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ABSTRACT

Providing strategies for parents to use to show their children how to take an active role in their own learning, this book discusses developing successful study skills, how speaking and listening can enhance your children's reading and writing skills, and techniques to help children expand their vocabularies. It focuses on helping children how to learn. After an introduction, chapters in the book are: (1) Active Reading and Writing; (2) Successful Study Skills and Test-Taking Strategies; (3) Speaking and Listening; (4) Expanding Your Child's Vocabulary; (5) Exploring Your Neighborhood and Beyond; (6) Participating in Your Community; (7) Active Television Viewing; and (8) Teamwork Learning. (RS)

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The Successful Learner Series

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The Active Learner

Help Your Child Learn by Doing

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The Successful Learner Series

Series editor,
Carl B. Smith, Ph.D.

Also in this series:

The Confident Learner:
Help Your Child Succeed in School

The Curious Learner:
Help Your Child Develop Academic
and Creative Skills

The Active Learner

Help Your Child Learn by Doing

Susan Moke • Michael Shermis

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Michael Shermis was the assistant director of the Family Literacy Center, the editor of *Parents and Children Together*, a monthly audio magazine, and the coordinator of the Parents Sharing Books program. He coauthored the first two books in the **Successful Learner** series, *The Confident Learner* and *The Curious Learner*. Currently he is associate editor for *Research & Creative Activity* and the Internet Resources Administrator at the Office of Research and the University Graduate School at Indiana University Bloomington. He also directs a World Wide Web development business and serves on several community service boards.

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Susan Moke thanks Tyagan Miller for his continuing admiration and support.

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A Note to Parents

Like most parents, you want your children to succeed. You can put your children on the road to success by helping them become active learners. This book provides you with strategies you can use to show your kids how to take an active role in their own learning. To enhance your children's success in the classroom, we provide discussions on developing successful skills, on how speaking and listening can enhance your children's reading and writing skills, and on techniques you can use to help your children expand their vocabularies. We also provide strategies for active learning beyond the classroom. Kids can learn about geography by exploring their neighborhoods and learn about problem solving and cooperating with others through volunteer work and social action. Even watching television presents opportunities for active learning when parents discuss programs with their kids. Finally, the chapter on teamwork learning illustrates how active learning is truly a family affair.

Each chapter also has a list of books—books for you to read to find out more about the topic, and books for you to share with your children. We divide these book lists into age categories: 4–6, 6–8, 8–10.

Now, begin the journey with your children toward helping them become active learners and powerful individuals who succeed in school and in life.

Introduction: The Active Learner

At some point in the developing years, every child says to his or her parents, "Let me do it. I can do it myself!" For the child, "I can do it myself" represents two major developments. First, it means the child recognizes that he has achieved a capability to act on his own. He feels a certain power over his environment, and that's a great feeling. Second, his "do it myself" statement is a declaration of independence. Early though it may be, that statement says "I'm on my way to becoming an independent person in this world of mine."

These are good signs—indications that a child is learning and wants to take responsibility for her actions. They hint at the theme of this book: Learners who actively pursue their own purposes using their own resources are more likely to succeed in school and in life.

Active learning does not mean telling a child to figure it out for himself and then walking away. If a parent placed a crawling baby at the top of a staircase and said, "You figure it out," we would doubt that

parent's common sense. But at the same age, the crawling age, we would applaud the parent who gives his child building blocks or other toys that encourage the child to play and learn. With the stairs, the parent quite appropriately puts up safety nets, lays down rules, and doesn't believe that the child should split his head open in a fall to appreciate the need for caution around staircases. Active learning is not a copout for adults, it is an attitude that encourages thinking and problem solving.

In contrast to active learning, we can best characterize passive learning by the lecture method. The adult has learned something important, lectures the child about it, and then expects the child to memorize the details. The lecture method certainly communicates information and the attitudes and values of the adult. Even though the child remembers them, she may not believe them or use them in her own life. To develop her own inner sense of personhood she must establish her own values and knowledge as a unique person. Passive learning does have its uses, though. We express all sorts of information in this manner: rules about fire and chemicals, street-crossing signs, or hygiene in restrooms. This kind of information is important for every child to learn.

But we start with the assumption that everyone needs to be an active learner to enjoy a successful life. Our children, even more than ourselves, will change jobs frequently during their lifetimes because modern

technology will constantly change the way we accomplish things. They will have to learn different skills than we did. Many of our children will have jobs that don't even exist now.

The speed of change in modern life offers a convincing argument for why we need to help our children become active learners. Those who don't develop an attitude that supports lifelong learning will find future employment, and life in general, an inhospitable place. As parents, then, we want to promote an attitude that encourages the skills our children need to take an active role in their own learning.

Active learning means more than "learning by doing." It is an attitude that fosters questions, problem-solving, and determination. Psychologists would call it "engagement." Active learning may be defined best through examples. Dorthea Cuddy, a parent whose whole family has experienced the benefits active learning provides, tells the following story:

> *When my son Michael's fourth-grade teacher asked her students to interview family members about their past, it was the beginning for our family of twenty years of extensive research into genealogy. The family tree aspect of family research is fascinating. However, the stories that accompany people's lives are what make the interview process so spellbinding. As a child, Michael would scan the phonebook of every city we visited and follow up with letters and phone calls to anyone bearing our surname.*
>
> *Michael's interest and determination helped us discover a set of legal papers, which were part of an estate settlement. These helped us locate some long-lost relatives in five different states. One distant cousin we discovered in California*

had information about a branch of the family that had been lost when a sister of my grandfather moved there during the Gold Rush.

Michael is a born teacher, storyteller, and author. The fire that ignited his quest into family history has expanded to the families of historical characters, especially in our locale. He was recently named city historian and will soon have a book published in conjunction with our local bicentennial. He is a lawyer by profession and an historian by avocation. A strong emphasis on history from the family and an encouraging push from his early school years have provided him with a great deal of fulfillment in life.

As Dorthea's son Michael discovered, active learning is searching. It is asking questions, testing ideas on others, challenging, summarizing, and revising. The scientist is an active learner because she searches for

patterns in nature that will help her understand it. A detective is an active learner because he searches for clues and evidence that will help him solve the problem—the crime committed. The lawyer is an active learner because she must search through past cases to help her client win a case. All sorts of careers require active learners. By helping your children become active learners, you are providing them with opportunities to succeed. A greater gift than this is hard to imagine.

1

Active Reading and Writing

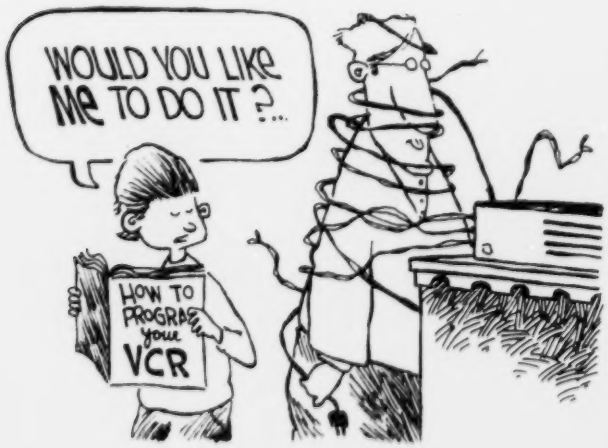
Educators agree that kids learn best and remember more when they take an active role in their own learning. Just like most of us adults, kids learn and remember more easily what they can apply to their lives. Do you read recipes or repair manuals for entertainment? Or do you read them to cook a new dish or to avoid paying a plumber $40 an hour to come over and seal a leaking pipe?

Adults who read "to do" are active learners. We typically use reading and writing to learn how to do something, solve problems, and express our ideas—we apply these "academic" skills in active, practical ways. By helping your child use reading to learn to do something she is interested in or by helping her use writing to express something that is important to her, you show

her how to become an active learner. Active learners are not passive consumers of random bits of knowledge. Rather, they are interested, motivated, focused seekers of information that has particular meaning for them.

Problem Solving Is Active Learning

What kinds of opportunities do you create for your kids to be active readers and writers? Reading directions to a game, instructions for assembling a model airplane, or cooking from a recipe provide such opportunities. Don't worry if your child does not read and understand each word of the instructions. This is a great way for him to figure out words from contextual clues. He also can test his comprehension of meaning, especially when he knows that you are handy to offer assistance as needed.



You might even begin to invent opportunities for your kids to learn how to do a task by reading instructions. If you write step-by-step instructions for their

chores, or for simple meals they can prepare, you encourage your kids to see reading and writing as useful tools—tools that important adults like Mom and Dad use every day to get things done.

Reading and writing take on a new meaning for kids when they use these "classroom" skills as problem-solving tools. What problems pose a special concern for your child? Is she interested in recycling? Is she concerned about a particular endangered species? What topics interest her that she would enjoy exploring with you? Your library is an excellent environment for active learning.

If you and your child go to the library to learn more about a subject of interest—say about a particular breed of dog—encourage your child to choose what information he finds valuable and discard or ignore the rest. Remember that your role is to guide him on this exploration, not to chart his course for him. While you may scout out sources of information and make suggestions, your child must decide what knowledge has real meaning for him. Active learners need a sense of independence; they need to develop the habit of being self-directed.

Use Writing to Solve Family Problems

When differences of opinion arise in your family, writing can be a great way to clear the air and allow each person to state his or her side of the issue. Keep a family journal in which everyone can write down thoughts, ideas, messages, and points of view to share with the rest of the family. Your journal can be a vehicle for conveying practical information, and it can provide opportunities for parents to offer praises for a job well done. It can also serve as a forum for stating different points of view in a family conflict.

Encourage your child to state her case in writing when she disagrees with parental decisions. By writing down the reasons she thinks she should be allowed to reschedule her bedtime, your child can state her point of view, let off some steam, and gain a new appreciation of writing as real communication. You can also use writing as a balm for soothing hurt feelings and cooling hot tempers. Ask your kids to write down a description of the events and behavior that led to one of those quarrels that ended with them muttering, "I hate you." Writing down their own points of view and reading the other person's can provide kids a great avenue for conflict resolution.

Keep your family journal in a location where every family member can read it and write in it regularly. Even young children can make contributions by drawing pictures or by dictating their thoughts to an older sister or brother or to Mom or Dad.

Talking and Listening Is Part of the Plan

Storytelling, reading aloud, sharing the day's experiences at the dinner table or before bedtime all encourage kids to see communication as natural, valuable, and enjoyable. From there it is a small step for your children to become active learners who appreciate reading and writing as worthwhile communication tools. Here are a few steps you can take to set that process in motion:

- Talk to your children about what you are doing. From the time they are born, get them accustomed to using language as a tool for understanding what is happening around them. Describe cause-and-effect situations such as, "I am going to use this new blue soap this evening for your bath because it smells so nice" or "Daddy is replacing the light bulb in that lamp because the old one burnt out."

- Talk to your kids in complete sentences. This will help them learn the sentence patterns they will encounter when they begin to read and write.

- Make time to really listen to your children, no matter what they are saying. Encourage your child to share her thoughts and experiences with you. By listening and encouraging them to talk to you, you give your kids valuable practice in using words, and you let them know that you appreciate them as unique individuals. Your listening lets your child know that you think she is important and reassures her that the thoughts and ideas she is expressing are important too. Good talkers make good readers and writers.

- Give tasks that require attention to only one thing at a time. Make the job appropriate to your child's age and abilities, and give directions carefully. Make sure you have your child's full attention when you give him instructions. Kneel, if necessary, to make eye contact. If this doesn't do the trick, take your child's hand in yours and hold her attention.

- When you give your child directions, follow through to see that he has understood and carried them out. Always praise a job well done. We all gain a little self-confidence each time we finish a job successfully. This is especially true for children.

- Read fun books aloud to your child for at least fifteen minutes every day. On those rare occasions when you don't read, use storytelling as an alternative. Pause frequently to let your child fill in a word. Ask your child questions about his reactions to what you are reading, and encourage him to interrupt whenever he has comments or questions.

- Get your child acquainted with the public library. Go there regularly and let your child browse for books she wants to borrow. Take home the books your children want, rather than the ones you think they should read.

Remember, you are your children's first and most important teacher. You have the chance to teach and influence your children in so many ways that affect their learning and eventual success in school. Make every day count. Show your love to your children. Give honest praise. Be a good example in your speech and manner of life. A child needs time. Give it in reading and writing. The rewards are well worth the effort.

Activities for Fun and Learning

Camp Out for Active Learning.
Plan an overnight camping trip for which your child needs to learn new skills. A few weeks before your trip, help your kids investigate answers to the following questions:

- What food is best to cook over a campfire? Where do we find good recipes?

- What campsites are available in our area?
- What first-aid techniques should we be aware of before we go camping? What first-aid materials should we take?
- What maps are available for the area where we will camp, and how do we read the maps?
- How do we use a compass to find our way around?
- What do people do at night when they're out in the woods without a TV?

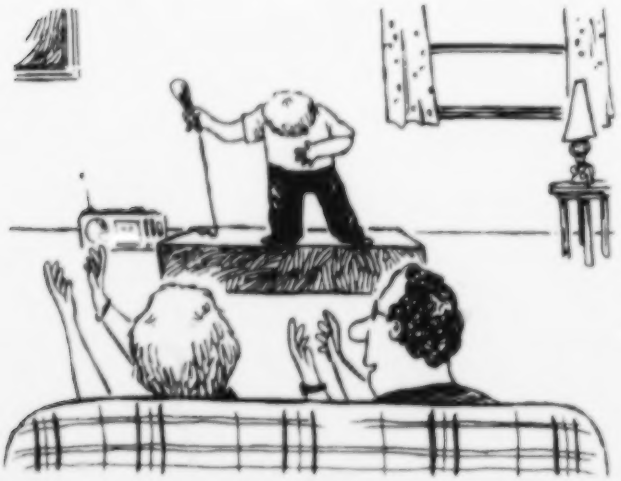
Write a Fractured Fairy Tale

Fairy tales are part of most children's early experience with storytelling. As children grow older, they may enjoy revising those fairy tales in imaginative ways that reflect their more grown-up perspective. Begin by telling the traditional version of a fairy tale and asking your kids to write or tell the story in their own way. This could involve a change of language ("Goldilocks and the Three Bears" as told by a Valley Girl) or a change of plot (A new version of how Hansel and Gretel handled that wicked witch). Encouraging kids to rewrite or retell fairy tales with interesting variations could lead to giggles all around.

All of Life is a Stage

We all enjoy making up stories that interpret our experiences or grow out of our imagination. Young children are no exception. Even young children who cannot yet write very well can use storytelling to reflect and interpret who they are and what they have done. Encourage your child to appreciate reading and writing as real communication by asking her to "write" a story with your help. After your child dictates the story, read it

back to her. She might even enjoy acting the story out. Find props to illustrate her ideas and to help with her dramatic storytelling.



An Animal Encyclopedia

Create your own Animal Encyclopedia by drawing pictures and writing descriptions of animals you see at the zoo.

Books for Parents

101 Ways to Help Your Child Learn to Read and Write, by Mary and Richard Behm. Ideas are presented to help parents use resources from around the home to promote literacy. The activities are educationally sound and fun for the parent and child to do together.

Real Books for Reading: Learning to Read with Children's Literature, by Linda Hart-Hewins and Jan Wells.

A comprehensive guide to using real books to nurture a love of reading and language for 3-to-8-year-olds. Parents will learn to evaluate specific books for children and discover useful criteria for choosing and exploring books with children.

Games for Reading: Playful Ways To Help Your Child Read, by Peggy Kaye. Helps children read by doing what kids like best: playing games. The games are fun, but they have a serious purpose: to help all beginning readers—those who have reading problems and those who do not—learn to read and want to read.

Help Your Child Read and Succeed: A Parent's Guide, by Carl B. Smith. This book explains to parents why they are the ones to give a love of reading to their children. Included are useful instructions on how to motivate your child, how to choose books your child will grow with and enjoy, and how to develop your child's vocabulary. Children will gain the confidence needed to read and succeed.

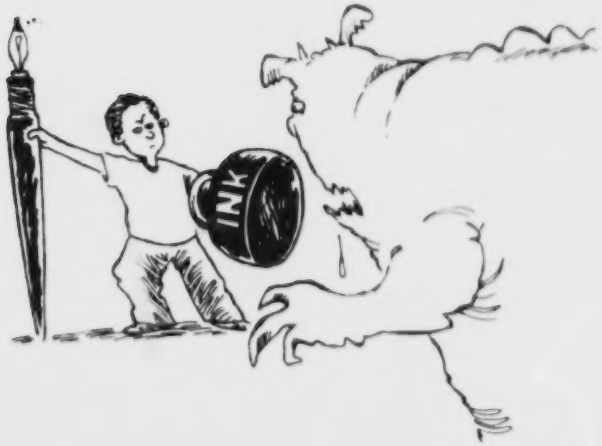
Beginning To Read: Thinking and Learning about Print, by Marilyn Jager Adams. A guide to helping parents teach their children the "right" way to learn to read. Adams shows that parents need not remain trapped in a teaching-for-meaning dilemma.

Books for Parents and Children to Share

Ages 4–6

Oh, How I Wish I Could Read! by John Gile with illustrations by Frank Fiorello. A fun-with-words, read-aloud book that provides amusement while focusing on the importance of reading. This message is reinforced with humorous mental images that will endure into adulthood.

Simon's Book, by Henrik Drescher. Simon is trapped on a piece of paper—with a monster. He must figure out a way to save himself by using pens and an ink bottle.



Story-Hour—Starring Megan! by Julie Brillhart. On days when the baby-sitter can't come, Megan's mother, a librarian, takes Megan and her baby brother Nathan to work. Megan likes going to work with her mother and being her assistant. But best of all about the library, Megan likes to read books. Then one day, Nathan howls during story hour, and guess who substitutes as story reader?

Ages 6–8

Hey! I'm Reading, by Betty Miles with illustrations by Sylvie Wickstom. A wonderful book to share with any child learning to read. The author explains, in simple terms, what readers actually do and gives beginners confidence and the chance to use their newly discovered skills.

Time for Bed and Double the Trouble, by Ellen Javernick. Children ready to try reading on their own will become eager participants with these books. Each title contains thought-provoking questions that are based on a story parents can use to open up a creative dialogue with children.

Jenny Archer, by Ellen Conford. Assigned to write the story of her life, Jenny misunderstands the purpose and beefs it up with fascinating fictional details, which her teacher interprets as lies.

Ages 8–10

Putting It in Writing, by Steve Otfinoski. This book shows different ways for children to organize their ideas. Explanations and samples of kids' writings, ages 8–10, are included as well as models and tips to follow for all your child's writing needs.

How to Be a Better Writer, by Elizabeth A. Ryan. A helpful, easy-to-read guide for writing better essays, short stories, poems, and more. Learn about what to do when you don't know what to say, how to organize your ideas, and many more proven hints and tips.

If You Were a Writer, by Joan Lowery Nixon with illustrations by Bruce Degen. Melia's mother, a writer, gives Melia writing tips on finding words that make pictures and how to show what is happening in a story. She teaches Melia how to look for nurturing and interesting story ideas and develop characters with problems to solve. Use this book as a springboard for writing original stories.

2

Successful Study Skills and Test-Taking Strategies

Your child's ability to be an active learner in the classroom is directly related to the quality of the learning environment you provide at home. This quality doesn't depend on your occupation, age, socioeconomic level, or educational attainments. Providing them with a proper study environment, helping them organize their time, and guiding their efforts are the factors that will assure a better chance of school success.

If you are a parent who has experienced frustration while trying to help your child with homework or study for a test, then let us offer you a few suggestions. These tips can not only help make study time hassle free, but they can increase the odds of your child receiving good grades.

Organizing Space and Time

Active learners often prosper in organized environments. An orderly place to study and a regular schedule that lets kids know when it's time to go to work supports active learning. As a parent, you are the supervisor and the support system. Although it is up to you to provide a regular place in your home for children to study, it is important for you to involve your children in this process. With your children, analyze the present use of space. Do they have too many toys and materials to make their room orderly? If so, help them figure out which toys can be put in boxes for a month. Then, a pattern of rotation will keep them more interested in the toys they have.

Next, study the storage system. Do your kids need containers and boxes in which to place their toys and materials? If so, provide these storage containers and then help them organize their possessions.

Finally, encourage your children to maintain an orderly environment by having a regularly scheduled cleanup time every week. Organize the tasks you expect them to complete and post them so they can check each task off as they complete it. If your child can't read yet, draw simple pictures of them or take photos of them doing the tasks.

For those of you who have trouble imagining your children keeping their rooms this organized, visit a Montessori school in your area. Montessori schoolrooms are structured so that every item has a specific place—and kids as young as two years old are involved in keeping it that way. What's the secret? The secret is the amount of time and effort the adults spends with the children organizing and maintaining the environment.

Once you have their play space organized, make sure there is a place for them to study. It should be a comfortable and quiet place that has all the study tools, such as paper, pencils, pens, and a dictionary.

When children have a place set aside to study, they can see that you have placed importance on their study habits. Establishing a regular time for study will support this. The key word is *regular*. We can't emphasize enough how critical this component is. Being flexible when out-of-town guests are visiting or health-related reasons require a change is OK. But wanting to watch TV, talk on the phone, or just being too tired are not good reasons to change the study schedule. Communicate the value you place on learning by making time for it a priority in the daily schedule. Consistency, a sense of order, and your presence during the study time for supervision and assistance can provide your children with a better chance of success for completing their homework and passing their tests.

A Guiding Role for Parents

Parents have several tasks to support their children's study habits. Here are a few of the most important ones.

1. Offer your children support, encouragement, and honest praise whenever possible. Your children must know you believe in them and their abilities. Don't compare them unfavorably with others. Instead, listen closely to their struggles and successes.

2. Be available to your children when they need assistance. Don't do their assignments, but let them know you are there to offer a helping hand when needed.

3. Help your children set realistic goals. Providing them with the opportunity to achieve simple goals early will mean that together you can set goals that are more challenging later.

4. Make goals specific. "I'll do better next time" is too vague. "I will raise my spelling grade a full letter grade on the next assignment" is more specific and can help you monitor improvement with greater ease.

5. Offer rewards if possible. Give your children the opportunity to decide what kind of reward they would like upon completion of the goal. Don't offer rewards for every

little thing. But a special outing or snack, or perhaps the opportunity to watch some extra television for bigger accomplishments can all be motivating factors if they have decided the reward is something they wish to work for.

Success with Test-Taking

Passing tests is something we all do almost every day—in school, on the job, playing sports, dealing with family problems. Every time someone says "You did it right," you passed a test. That's all a test is—a judgment about a particular event or a particular behavior.

"Oh, but some tests are worse than others," you say. And that's right. Those situations that are labeled tests put psychological pressure on us because we know that we're on the spot. School tests are like that. Starting a job on probation puts pressure on us because other people may know that we are being tested to see if we are fit for that job. Under those conditions, we may build up fears in ourselves and create internal stress that prevents us from doing our best.

Test Anxiety

Having unusually strong fears about taking tests is called "test anxiety." When you have test anxiety, you are experiencing feelings of fear that you can't measure up to certain expectations—and so you don't. If your child suffers from test anxiety, there are a number of things you can do to relieve the fear.

First of all, help your child recognize that test anxiety is a fear, a feeling that slows down her reactions, and that it actually gets in the way of her ability to perform. President Franklin Roosevelt once said to the American people: "We have nothing to fear but fear itself." In other words, when we concentrate on failure and on our own

embarrassment, we create a barrier to our best performance. That's the reason that some children freeze up or begin to cry when faced with a test. They have built up so much internal stress that they are immobilized with fear.

If your child is reasonably prepared for a test and knows how to follow the directions, there is no reason why he cannot do an adequate job. Preparation can give your child the confidence to tackle a test because he has built up the knowledge and the skills needed for success. This is where your attitude and your help come into play. You can help him prepare by planning regular reviews of the subject in advance of the test. For example, you can take five minutes every other night to quiz your child on key points.

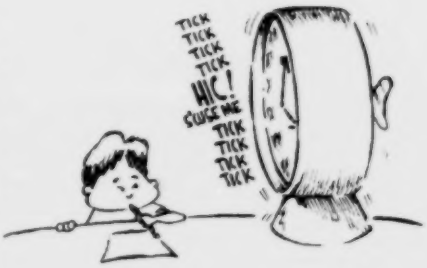
You can also help by showing your child how to take notes that will remind her of the important facts and ideas covered in the test. Most test topics can be summarized in one sentence. Work with your child to write a summary sentence that gives the theme of the study unit. Learning to write a summary sentence is a good note-taking technique that will help your child to review and to recall important information. Then go through the chapter she is studying and add a list of words that will remind her of the important details that support the theme statement.

Practice Tests

Besides the general preparation that we just talked about, it is helpful to practice on tests that are similar to the ones your child will take. Football and basketball teams prac-

tice their skills daily, but they also have scrimmage games. These are games that are played among teammates as a way of preparing for the games that count. Why not do the same thing with school tests? Taking practice tests not only gives your child practice on material similar to the real test, but also reduces anxiety during testing at school.

Besides, if you and your child review a practice test together, it gives you a chance to point out how tests are written; it gives your child an opportunity to become a little more "testwise." There are all kinds of tests given in school, but the one thing they have in common is the instructions for taking the test. So the first thing your child should do is pay close attention to the directions. Some children find it helpful to underline the key words in the instructions so they don't forget the specific steps they are to take.



Time may be a factor in some tests. Generally speaking, students should read the test material carefully, but they should also keep moving. If there is a time limit, they need to pace their work so they can complete the test within that limit. If they have an hour to complete the test, they need to ask themselves if they have completed half the work when they have reached the thirty-minute mark. This should be their goal, and they need to keep an eye on the clock to make sure that they are moving at a reasonable pace.

Attitude and Health

By now, it should be clear to you that your child's mental attitude is just as important as being prepared. By following some of the recommendations that we have made, your child should feel more prepared, and that alone will reduce test anxiety. But your attitude also influences how your child feels. Even if you suffered from test anxiety when you were in school, you should try not to pass along that fear to your children.

Talk to your children about tests as normal activities in life, as events that well-prepared people take in stride. You won't win all the games you play, and you won't ace every test you take. But you should do the best you can and smile when it is over. The language you use about school tests sets the stage for the attitude that your children will carry with them. Reassure them. Remind them that they have prepared, and that they have had a good night's sleep and a good breakfast so their mind and body can function

well. These calm reassurances will let your children know that you are not applying undue pressure; that you expect them to do their best, but you don't expect perfection.

There is no doubt that each of us can learn to do better on the tests that we face in life. Whether in school or on the job, we can improve our performance and therefore our rating if we do the following:

1. Study ahead of time. Good, solid learning takes time and practice. Practice over time gives us a sense of confidence in what we are doing.

2. Focus on the task. Relax and eliminate distractions. Read the directions carefully and follow them methodically. If they are not clear, ask for clarification.

3. Use time wisely. We all operate under time constraints. Work hard on those things that you know well, but keep moving. Remember, a test is meant to take a sample of what a person knows or what a person can do. The teacher doesn't want to know everything that is in the student's mind.

4. Go to bed early. We all perform better when we have adequate rest and food. To be alert and to retain the energy needed for a test, we need a good night's sleep and a nourishing breakfast to start the day.

5. Be a cheerleader. When there is pressure to perform, we like to have others urging us on. That's why you, as a parent, should send your children to school with a pat on the back or a hug. At the same time, tell your children that they have to keep talking to themselves about the good work that they have done and about the preparation they have made. They have to learn to cheer themselves into doing well on their tests.

As we have said, tests are a part of life. We should see them as challenges, as opportunities to lift our energies

and our spirits, and as ways to grow and to advance. But we also have to keep them in perspective. Tests are merely small samples of what we can do—sometimes a sample that shows a peak performance, sometimes a sample that shows a mediocre performance. No matter, we are still whole persons who have great value.

Activities for Fun and Learning

The following activities help children learn while having fun. Select one for you and your child to do together.

Count on It

Look at a magazine with your child and ask her to count some of the different things you both see. For example: cookies on a page, flowers in a bouquet, letters in a word, or faces in a crowd.

Shape Designs

Help your child improve his hand coordination and control by drawing a shape on a piece of paper for him to surround with larger repetitions of your original. Use a different color for each repetition and a pretty design will result.

Dots

Play a game with your child that will help her learn multiplication. First, take turns selecting two numbers. Then, draw vertical lines equal to the first number. On top of those, draw horizontal lines equal to the second number. Finally, draw dots where the lines intersect. The number of dots is equal to the first number multiplied by the second number.

The End

Ask your child to make up an ending to this sentence. "On my way to school this morning I heard a soft tinkling sound

and suddenly . . . ." Then encourage him to tell or write a story that stems from his sentence.

These activities are taken from *Games for Learning*, by Peggy Kaye (The Noonday Press).

Books for Parents

The Grade Booster Guide for Kids, by Roy Kern and Richard Smith. Describes easy-to-follow plans for better grades and test scores. Includes strategies for evaluating study habits, recommendations for test preparation, and tips on taking tests. Discusses schedules, physical health, note taking, eating, sleeping, and how to get help from classmates, teachers, and parents.

Test without Trauma: How to Overcome Test Anxiety and Score Higher on Every Test, by Bette Erwin and Elza Teresa Dinwiddie. Provides an introduction to testing, measurement, and evaluation. Examines the possible causes of test anxiety and suggests ways to deal with and reduce test-related tension. Also gives advice on how to cope with test results.

Dr. Gruber's Essential Guide to Test Taking for Kids, by Gary R. Gruber. Introduces parents to standardized tests and general test-taking skills. Outlines test-taking strategies for vocabulary, sentence completion, reading comprehension, writing, analogies, math problems, quantitative comparison, and rules and shortcuts. Notes ways to help children reduce test anxiety.

Books for Parents and Children to Share

Ages 4–6

Country Animals, by Lucy Cousins (Tambourine). A board book containing drawings of rural wildlife. The name for each animal is also given.

More First Words / My Birthday Party, by Margaret Miller (HarperCollins). Uses photographs and simple text to show the different things one may see or do at a birthday party.

I See, by Rachel Isadora (Greenwillow). Large print and easy-to-read vocabulary display things a young child might see in a typical day.

Shapes, by Gwenda Turner (Viking). Presents triangles, squares, circles, rectangles, hearts, and stars as they appear in everyday life. Illustrates each figure with a cutout of the shape.

Abracadabra to Zigzag, by Nancy Lecourt (Lothrop). This alphabet book displays funny and unique words and phrases found in spoken English with explanations for each. Includes "dillydally," "itsy bitsy," "rolypoly," "upsy daisy."

Hard to Be Six, by Arnold Adoff (Lothrop). A six-year-old boy wants to be older so he can do all of the things his ten-year-old sister can do. He learns from his grandma to be patient and "take time slow, make love count, and pass love on."

Ages 6–8

See You in Second Grade! by Miriam Cohen. While this group of first-graders is enjoying their end-of-the-year picnic, they think about the great year they have had. After a few moments to remember, they are anxious to begin second grade the following year.

The True Francine, by Marc Brown. Francine and Muffy are best friends, until Muffy cheats on a math test

and Mr. Ratburn blames Francine. Finally Muffy decides to be a loyal friend and tell the truth.

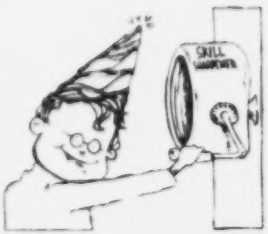
What to Do When Your Mom or Dad Says . . . "Get Good Grades!" by Joy Wilt Berry (Childrens Press). Defines the purpose of tests and grades. Presents practical skills that will enable students to get the most out of tests and grades.

Help Is on the Way for: Tests, by Marilyn Berry (Childrens Press). Defines what a test is and why tests are important. Outlines ways to prepare and to study for a test, and gives tips for taking different types of tests.

Family Secrets, by Susan Shreve. Includes a short story on cheating in which a boy cheats on a math test and thinks he is a criminal. Then he must face his parents and teacher. After confessing and retaking the test, he no longer feels guilty and unhappy.

Hey, Hay! A Wagonful of Funny Homonym Riddles, by Marvin Terban (Clarion Books). Presents words that sound the same, but are spelled differently and have different meanings in an entertaining format. Offers a great way to study for a test on homonyms and have fun.

Ages 8–10



How to Sharpen Your Study Skills, by Sigmund Kalina. Gives practical advice on taking notes and tests. Includes tips to help students develop a better memory, use their library, and do homework.

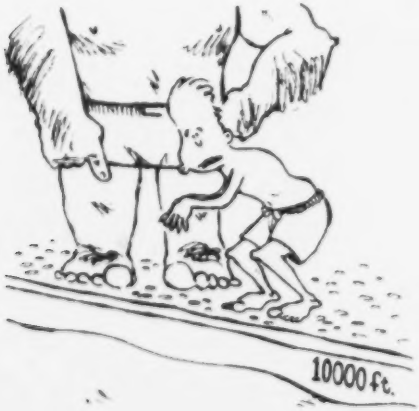
How to Be School Smart: Secrets of Successful Schoolwork, by Elizabeth James and Carol Barkin. Describes successful organization of study space and time,

different learning styles, ways to handle homework, and tips for taking tests.

Josh: A Boy with Dyslexia, by Caroline Janover (Waterfront Books). Shows how important testing for learning differences can be in a child's education. Presents a young boy with dyslexia and the problems he has in school and everyday life. Also includes information on dyslexia and organizations that deal with learning differences.

Test-taking Strategies, by Judi Kesselman-Turkel and Franklynn Peterson. Explains different kinds of tests and the best strategies to use for taking each. Covers a variety of test formats and subjects.

The Testing of Charlie Hammelman, by Jerome Brooks. Charlie does not want to take a swimming test and seeks the advice of a psychiatrist. Shows some of the tests Charlie must deal with as he matures.



Sixth Grade Can Really Kill You, by Barthe DeClements. Helen is afraid she will never get out of sixth grade because of her reading problems. Describes some of the difficulties kids face in school.

3

Speaking and Listening

Speaking is more than just a way of communicating information to others and asking questions. Likewise, listening is more than just "not talking".

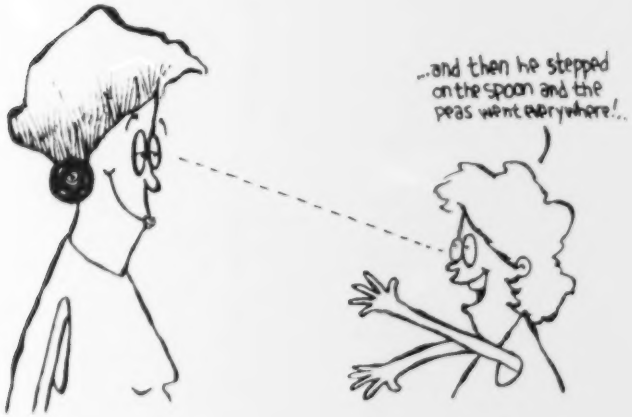
Many of us tend to ignore the fact that speaking also helps us to communicate with ourselves. Talking about our experiences helps us to understand them. Especially in times of stress or confusion, we all "think out loud" in order to organize our thoughts so we can deal with them.

Verbalizing our thoughts and feelings allows us to describe unfamiliar experiences in words we are comfortable with. It allows us to take stock of what we already know and to identify what we need to learn.

Talking serves exactly the same purpose for our children. Talking allows them to organize and further understand experiences they have already had. It gives

them a chance to relate new knowledge to ideas they are already familiar with and it enables them to see how their feelings influence their behavior.

As parents, most of us talk more than we listen. Do you really listen when your six-year-old talks to you? Once, when my daughter Marla was twelve years old, she handed me a cartoon as I was reading the newspaper. It was a *Family Circus* cartoon that showed the father reading a newspaper and the little girl looking up at him. The little girl in the cartoon was saying "Daddy, you have to listen to me with your eyes, not just your ears." My daughter giggled and said: "I used to think that very same thing when I was younger."



Listening is not an easy job. It is more than just hearing another person's words. Real listening is an active process which involves paying attention to and trying to understand the message behind what another person is saying. My daughter taught me that eye contact helps make the speaker feel connected with the listener.

How to Listen to Your Child

By learning to communicate effectively, we develop a positive self-image. Parents who take time to talk with and really listen to their children are actually improving their children's self-esteem. When a parent does this, she also strengthens her own image of herself as a good parent. Here are six ways you can improve conversation between yourself and your child:

1. Be interested. Invite your child to share her opinions and ideas with you so that she will become comfortable explaining her thoughts to you. Encourage her to identify and name her feelings by putting them into words. Let her know you are paying attention by picking up on and verbally interpreting her body language and then invite her to translate the feelings she expresses with gestures into words. For example, if your child becomes annoyed with you and expresses her frustration by sulking (every parent recognizes the slouchy shoulders, lowered eyebrows, and jutting lip which indicate that his child has resorted to the "full-body pout"), you might say, "You don't seem very happy. It's OK for you to tell me that you're mad at me. We usually feel better after we talk about our feelings."

2. Avoid dead-end questions. Open up conversation rather than cutting it off. Instead of saying, "Did you learn anything in school today?" you might open up a conversation by asking, "What stories did you read at school today?" or "Who did you play with at recess?" If you want to start a conversation with your child, avoid questions which require a yes or no or right answer in response.

3. Extend conversation. Pick up on some part of your child's conversation and extend it. If your child says, "Michael Jordan is my favorite basketball player," you might ask him,

"What does Michael Jordan do that you like seeing?" When you incorporate your child's own words into your speech, you strengthen his confidence in his own verbal skills and you also let him know that his ideas and opinions are valued.

4. Share your thoughts. Let your child know what you are thinking about. If you are wondering how to arrange the furniture or trying to decide about a gift for a relative, ask your child questions like, "I'm not sure where to put this chair. Where do you think would be a good place?" or "What do you think Grandma would like for her birthday?" Be sure to take your child's opinions seriously by talking out the practical implications of her suggestions.

5. Define and reflect feelings. If you think something is bothering your child, make the best guess you can about

what it is. By doing so, you open up two possibilities for conversation. If you have guessed right, then you and your child can discuss ways of coping with the problem. If you have guessed wrong, you have given your child the opportunity to tell you so and to talk about what is really bothering him. For example, you might say, "You seem to be feeling sad today. Did something happen at school?" This soft approach is more likely to get a child to talk about his feelings than directly asking him "What's wrong?"

6. Observe cues. Your child will give you hints that let you know when she's ready to end a conversation. When she starts staring into space or giving really silly responses, it's probably time to stop.

Language Models

We all learn about language by interacting with other people. Children are influenced by and learn to imitate the language used by those around them. Every parent who has heard a Bart Simpson phrase come out of his child's mouth can testify to the fact that children develop their speaking skills by imitating models in their immediate environment. Parents, teachers, and television—all of these models influence a child's attitudes toward the use of language (As one language specialist has said, "Language is more caught than taught"). The way you speak with and listen to your child is the largest and most influential factor in determining how she will learn to communicate with others. A child spends more time and has a deeper involvement with his parents than with any other adult. As parents, we control most of the contact our children have with society.

Modeling good listening and speaking skills for our children means more than just correcting their grammar. In fact, modeling good language use for our children and

encouraging them to use language as a tool for understanding their experiences and expressing their feelings is far more effective than correcting speech errors.

Since television also serves as a powerful model of language use for children, it is a good idea to take time to watch and discuss your children's favorite programs with them. Television doesn't provide the interaction that children need from teaching models, but you can provide that interaction by sharing and discussing their TV viewing with them.

Will Developing Good Speaking and Listening Skills Help My Child at School?

Recent studies show that good listening skills positively affect children's ability to learn to read. Reading is really a thinking process which involves reconstructing meaning

from print. Consequently, children with good communication skills are better able to "hear" the words they read. Communication skills usually influence a child's success in reading activities because spoken language serves as the bridge between the new ideas represented in books and things the child already knows.

Regularly reading aloud with our children serves a similar purpose. Because written language is usually different from spoken language, we "bridge the gap" between those two modes of communication for our children by reading to them. Reading aloud also gets our children used to the language patterns of literature, improves their vocabulary, and increases their understanding of the world around them. When a child becomes familiar with books because her parents have read aloud to her, learning to read is more likely to be a pleasurable activity for her.

Right now you are probably saying to yourself, "I can understand how good listening skills can help my child to become a more successful student, but talking in school is only going to get him into trouble." In fact, talking is as important to the process of learning and understanding new concepts as listening is. We all need to participate in

and experience knowledge in order to really learn. Likewise, children need regular practice in expressing their own meanings if they are going to develop the ability to really understand what they read and hear. If they do not have the opportunity to speak and write about new knowledge, it is difficult for their reading and listening skills to progress beyond mere word recognition. Learning is an interactive and dynamic process. Children can make new ideas their own by discussing, dramatizing, writing about, or singing about them. This kind of learning encourages children to incorporate new knowledge into their own understanding of the world.

Activities for Fun and Learning

One enjoyable way to improve speaking and listening skills is to practice by playing games. Select one or two of the following to share with your children.

Hear, Here

Make a tape of sounds you hear regularly in your home, such as popcorn popping, a dog barking, a cat meowing, a baby crying, a faucet dripping, a door opening and closing, a vacuum running, wind chimes clinking, a person yawning, or a family member laughing. Let your children listen to the sounds and identify what they hear.

You Name It

Read aloud the word that appears in bold print. Then read the list of items that follow it and ask your child to select which items are most closely related to the word in bold print. Correct answers are in italics.

COLD

ice, shoe, book, *snow*

GREEN
lips, *grass,* coffee, *lime*

SMALL
fly, button, house, truck

ROUND
box, sock, *ball, penny*

LOUD
whisper, *thunder,* flower, *drums*

BIG
mouse, *elephant, mountain,* peanut

HOT
paper, *sun,* ring, *oven*

Now let your children make up some to ask you.

Nursery Rhymes

Read a line from a familiar nursery rhyme using an incorrect word, and allow your child to give the correct word. For example:

Jack and Jill went up the hill, to fetch a **sail** of water . . .
(pail)

Mary had a little **ham** whose fleece was white as snow . . .
(lamb)

Hickory, Dickory, Dock, the mouse **skipped** up the clock . . .
(ran)

Peter, Peter Pumpkin-Eater had a **life** and couldn't keep her . . . (wife)

Three **fine** mice, three **fine** mice, see how they run . . . (blind)

There was an old woman who **baked** in a shoe . . . (lived)

Jack be nimble, Jack be quick, Jack **walk** over the candlestick . . . (jump)

Mary, Mary, quite contrary, how does your garden **blow** . . . (grow)

The End of the Rhyme.

Challenge your children to fill in the blank with a word that rhymes with the last word of the first phrase.

1. Behind the log
   was a spotted _____. (frog or dog)
2. I will bake
   a banana _____. (cake)
3. He ran through the house
   when he saw the _____. (mouse)
4. I polished my shoe
   so it looks like _____. (new)
5. If you throw that jar,
   will it go very _____? (far)
6. She was trying to tell
   who was ringing the _____. (bell)
7. The big fat cat
   ran after the dirty old _____. (rat)
8. While they go for a walk
   they will laugh and _____. (talk)

These activities were taken from *Teach Vital Learning Skills: Listening Games for Elementary Grades,* by Margaret John Maxwell.

Chalkboard Chatter

Mary Ann Duke, a literacy teacher in Sarasota, Florida, sent us this story about the importance of practicing.

As my mother used to say, "Anything worthwhile takes effort!" It does take effort to be a parent these days. I guess that's one of the facts of life.

Sometimes the word "effort" can be translated into the word "practice." For example, the masterful performance of a great violinist, pianist, football player, or gymnast is a result of PRACTICE. Without practice in the beginning, one may never achieve the level of skill required to be "really good." Without continued practice, sharpened skills will soon begin to erode.

Learning to read requires a similar kind of effort. You can do many things to help your child practice the skill of reading. Moreover, the effort your child exerts in this type of practice can actually be fun!

One of the most important things you can do is read to your child every day. Every piece of research I have ever read on the subject of teaching children to read lists reading aloud as a priority. Teachers should read aloud to

their students; parents should read aloud to their children. My own mother (remember the person I quoted at the beginning of this article?) understood that. Even though I am 49 years old, she still wants to read to me when I visit. Usually it is an article from the newspaper, or a magazine, or an excerpt from a book she is currently reading and very excited about. My mother used to read aloud to me in order to help me sharpen my reading skills. Now this experience is a way for us to share our current interests and enthusiasms.

When you read to your children, choose books with their interests in mind. Visit your local library. The shelves abound with wonderful selections, and the children's librarian will be glad to help you.

Get excited about children's magazines and read them together. Read the articles, work the crossword puzzles together, the dot-to-dots, mazes, etc. Take your children to the magazine section of the bookstore to make selections. When you discover your child likes a particular magazine, subscribe to it in your child's name. If a fond grandma, aunt, or uncle is wondering what to give your

child as a special birthday or Christmas present, suggest a subscription to his favorite magazine.

Since seeing yourself on videotape or hearing yourself on an audio cassette tape is a very interesting experience; you might use these tools to improve your child's reading ability. Turn on the tape recorder and let your child read a passage unrehearsed. Play it back. Then have your child practice (there's that word again) the passage and read it again while being taped a second time. Both you and your child will be impressed by the way practice improves her reading of the passage. These activities can all be fun learning experiences . . . and that is what this chapter is all about . . . helping parents have fun with their children while teaching them, training them, and loving them in the process. ENJOY!

Books for Parents

Are You Listening? by Ralph G. Nichols and Leonard A. Stevens. Explains the physical and physiological aspects of listening. Chapters focus on various places where listening occurs, including family circles, schools, conferences, business meetings, sales situations, and several others. Covers different styles of listening, and provides tips to enhance listening.

That's Not What I Meant! How Conversational Style Makes or Breaks Relationships, by Deborah Tanner, Ph.D. Presents ways to identify conversational styles, and discusses how they are different and similar. Looks at conversation in several types of relationships, including friendships, marriages, and the workplace.

How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk, by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish. Suggests ways to avoid turning simple conversations into arguments, to instruct rather than criticize when

you correct your child's behavior, and to find effective alternatives to punishment.

The New Read-Aloud Handbook, by Jim Trelease. Explains why, how, and when to read aloud. Offers guidance concerning what to do and not to do while reading aloud. Recommends books for parents to read aloud with their children. Categories include the following: predictable, wordless, picture, short novels, novels, poetry, and reference.

No Nonsense Parenting Guide: Tough Topics, by Sara Wilford. Gives parents ideas on using books to talk to their children about current issues and problems. Includes an annotated list of suggested titles, and ideas for parents and teachers working together. Also covers literacy and learning to read.

Draw-and-Tell: Reading • Writing • Listening • Speaking • Viewing • Shaping, by Richard Thompson (Annick Press). Contains twelve short stories to share with children. Each of these stories includes instructions for telling the story as well as a built-in visual map

which shows you how to illustrate the story as you tell it. If you follow the simple directions for illustrating the story line, you will end up with a picture of one of the characters in the story. The introduction provides ideas and techniques for good storytelling.

Books for Parents and Children to Share

Ages 4–6

More First Words: Playtime, by Margaret Miller (HarperCollins). Photographs of children and large-type print present different actions which occur during play. Allows a child to associate a word with a specific action.

Who Says That? by Arnold L. Shapiro (Dutton). Shows over twenty animals and insects, sounds they make, plus several girls and boys and the noises they generate. Text rhymes to make reading more lively and appealing.

Polar Bear, Polar Bear, What Do You Hear? by Bill Martin, Jr. (Henry Holt). This companion to the well-known *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* focuses on sounds different animals make. While reading, children will enjoy chanting the rhythmic words and making animal noises.

The Listening Walk, by Paul Showers (HarperCollins). A little girl and her father take a listening walk around town. They do not hurry, and they do not talk. They do keep very still and listen closely to discover all of the different sounds around them. Draws a child's attention to some noises and sounds he might hear if he listens intently.

Baby's Boat, by Jeanne Titherington (Greenwillow). Serene and gentle pictures illustrate this youngster's voyage in a silver moon boat. Parents can share this lullaby with children before tucking them in bed.

The Napping House, by Audrey Wood. This is a cozy tale about a snoring granny, a dozing dog, a slumbering mouse, and several other engaging creatures. Everyone in the group is fast asleep, until a flea wakes up and chaos begins!

Ages 6–8

The Kitten Who Couldn't Purr, by Eve Titus (Morrow). Jonathan, the kitten, doesn't communicate well because he can't purr. After unsuccessful attempts at barking, mooing, and quacking, he finds another way to convey a message. Uses predictable text and large pictures.

Amazing Grace, by Mary Hoffman (Dial). Grace wants to try out for the part of Peter Pan at school, but her classmates tell her she can't since she is a girl and she is Black. With the help of her family, Grace discovers she can be anything she wants to be. Because she has the courage to speak up and try out, Grace gets the part and gives an excellent performance.

Aunt Isabel Tells a Good One, by Kate Duke (Dutton). Aunt Isabel is a remarkable storyteller, and shows young Penelope how to tell a good story by spinning a fanciful tale. Presents storytelling to children as a fun and inventive activity, instead of a task to perform at school for a grade.

Mandy, by Barbara D. Booth (Lothrop). Mandy is deaf and she hates the dark because in the darkness, she can't sign or read anyone's lips; it makes her feel so alone. When her grandmother loses a special brooch, Mandy braves a storm at night to find it even though she is frightened. Gives readers a glimpse of what a commonplace incident might be like for a deaf child.

Sheep in a Shop, by Nancy Shaw (Houghton Mifflin). Rhythmic text and amusing illustrations show five sheep on a whimsical shopping adventure. After they select their gift, they discover they do not have enough cash to pay for it. These clever sheep solve their problem and figure out a way to stay cool at the same time.

Tikki Tikki Tembo, by Arlene Mosel. Presents a humorous fable that explains why Chinese people changed the tradition of giving their firstborn sons long first names, and began giving all their children short names. Children enjoy hearing the repetition of the long name, "Tikki tikki tembo-no sa rembo-chari bari ruchi-pip peri pembo," and saying it themselves.

Ages 8–10

The Vicar of Nibbleswicke, by Roald Dahl (Viking). Reverend Lee's position is threatened because he has a disability which causes him to turn all of his words around. Luckily, the local doctor knows the cure: "walking backwards while speaking." This witty tale was written for the benefit of the Dyslexia Institute.

You Can Speak Up in Class, by Sara Gilbert (Beech Tree Books). Addresses feelings of discomfort and anxiety that students have when speaking in the classroom. Presents reasons for these problems and gives practical ways to deal with them.

Help Is on the Way for: Listening Skills, by Marilyn Berry. Comic-book illustrations and well organized text explain five steps to successful listening. Also provides tips to improve listening habits at school.

Amy: The Story of a Deaf Child, by Lou Ann Walker. Photographs and a first-person account reveal how Amy deals with her deafness. Hearing aids and sign language help Amy enjoy life and participate in activities that other children enjoy.

James and the Giant Peach, by Roald Dahl. When James crawls into an overgrown peach, he joins a variety of giant creatures for a series of fantastic escapades. After several close calls, this extraordinary group lands in New York City, to begin their new lives.

More Stories to Solve: Fifteen Folktales from around the World, told by George Shannon (Greenwillow). Each concise story contains a riddle to solve. Children can listen to the story read aloud, then propose a solution.

4

Expanding Your Child's Vocabulary

Have you noticed that you never tire of hearing some words, while other words and phrases begin to irritate you? We always like to hear "You're doing a great job!" or "I love you." Those phrases seem to carry new meaning each time they are spoken.

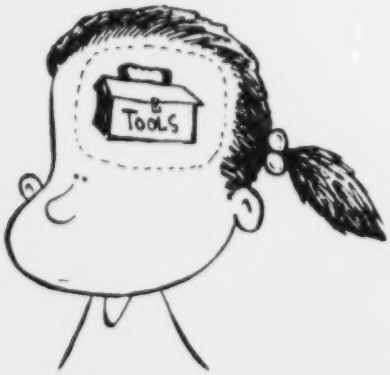
But then there are other words which bore us because they are used endlessly and without real meaning. The word "neat" especially bothers me: "That's a neat dress. She's a neat person. Isn't that a neat car? What a neat idea!" The use of "neat" in all these cases shows either lazy thinking or a limited vocabulary. These statements indicate some vague appreciation but nothing more. Is the dress "neat" because you like the color, because its design fascinates you, or because it flatters the figure of the wearer? I don't know. If you expand your vocabu-

lary, perhaps I will understand why you think that dress is special.

What Is a Good Vocabulary and Why Does My Child Need One?

A vocabulary is a sort of mental tool chest which we use to communicate our ideas and feelings to other people. Someone who has the verbal equivalent of a saw, a pair of pliers, and a screwdriver in her mental tool chest can accomplish a lot more with words than someone who has only a hammer. The more words a person has at her fingertips, the more precise she can be in expressing her ideas. At school and in the world of work, our ability to present our ideas clearly is a key element of successful performance. By helping her improve her vocabulary, you can

- improve your child's success at school
- boost your child's IQ
- increase your child's future job opportunities



Because words give people control over a world full of information, expanding their vocabulary helps children gain better control over their school subjects and over their home life. Developing a good vocabulary helps children become more capable of articulating their questions about math problems at school, and it helps them become more comfortable talking about their deeper feelings at home with Mom or Dad.

Most of us see the range and depth of someone else's vocabulary as a sure clue about that person's intelligence. In fact, when I was younger I figured people who were really smart (my second-grade teacher, for instance) had probably read the dictionary from cover to cover. Now I know that people don't usually develop a rich vocabulary from trying to read the dictionary with the same enthusiasm they would give to an adventure or romance novel. People sharpen their vocabulary skills by reading lots of different books (yes, these include adventures and romances) which excite their interest. The single most effective thing a parent can do to expand his child's vocabulary is to read with him and to encourage his child's interest in a variety of books. Talking with him about what he is reading will enable you to help your child relate new words to ones with which he is already familiar. That's how our vocabularies grow.

Developing a rich vocabulary won't just help your child during her school years. In our increasingly information-oriented society, our ability to present our ideas clearly makes us more competitive in a tight job market. Well chosen words are the currency your child will use to participate in the information marketplace. In a certain sense, word power is becoming an index of an individual's buying power. For instance, a recent study of business managers revealed that people with high-paying jobs also had very well-developed vocabularies.

What Parents Can Do

You can help your child expand his vocabulary by showing him how new words relate to those with which he is already familiar. You can show him words that are similar, words that sound alike, words that look alike, and words with opposite meanings. Helping your child identify and understand these relationships is one way to expand his vocabulary.

For instance, synonyms are words that have the same meaning. Like members of the same family who all have the same last name, synonyms are related to one another because they share the same "source" or meaning.

How many synonyms can you think of for the word "angry?"

mad	exasperated
put-out	irate
peeved	fit to be tied
livid	upset
enraged	vexed
annoyed	irritated
steamed	hot under the collar

You could probably come up with a few more if you think about it, or if you consult a book called a synonym finder or a thesaurus.

Searching for synonyms will help your child expand her vocabulary because it encourages her to experiment with several different ways of expressing the same idea or emotion. "Looking for Synonyms" is a word game you can play almost anywhere—you and your child can play it while you are waiting for a doctor's appointment or running errands in the car, or cooking dinner in your own kitchen.

You can make it easy to play this game by starting a stack of word cards. (Use 3" x 5" cards or some old business cards.) Write one word on each card. When you find a few spare minutes, you or your child can draw a card and then take turns finding synonyms for the selected word. Don't worry about finding words you think your child needs to know. Be satisfied to show her that expanding her vocabulary can be fun.

Like synonyms, homophones are also related to one another because they are similar. Have you ever known two brothers or sisters who sound just alike when you talk to them on the telephone? Homophones are like two brothers who can trick you because they sound nearly identical but aren't really the same person. Homophones sound identical but they don't look alike or mean the same thing. Do you remember when you struggled over the spelling of words like tale and tail? Did you worry about which spelling to use when you wrote about accidentally closing the door on your cat's tail or when you wrote about a fairy tale?

Ask your child to come up with homophones for the following words and then discuss the different spellings and meanings of these words which sound the same:

TO	too, two
ATE	eight
FLOWER	flour
PEACE	piece
TAIL	tale
OUR	hour
BERRY	bury

Can you think of any other words which sound alike but have different meanings?

We've talked about how synonyms are words that have similar meanings and homophones are words that have the same sound. There is one more group of words related to one another on the basis of their "alikeness." They are called homonyms. Homonyms look and sound alike, but have different meanings depending on their context.

Like twins, two homonyms appear to be the same word because they look and sound exactly alike even though they are really different. Discussing homonyms with your child is a great way to clue him in to the idea that he can often guess at the meaning of an unfamiliar word by thinking about its context. Homonyms are words which have multiple uses. How they are used in a sentence determines their meaning. Think about how context determines the meaning of the following homonyms:

The mama **BEAR** hugged her cub.
That baby's mother cannot **BEAR** to see him cry.

Both of these sentences say something about mothers and their babies. However, in the first sentence, the word bear is used as a noun and refers to an animal, and in the second sentence, it is used as a verb which means to tolerate.

Here is another example:

Farmers display animals at the state **FAIR**.
The weather man predicted **FAIR** weather.

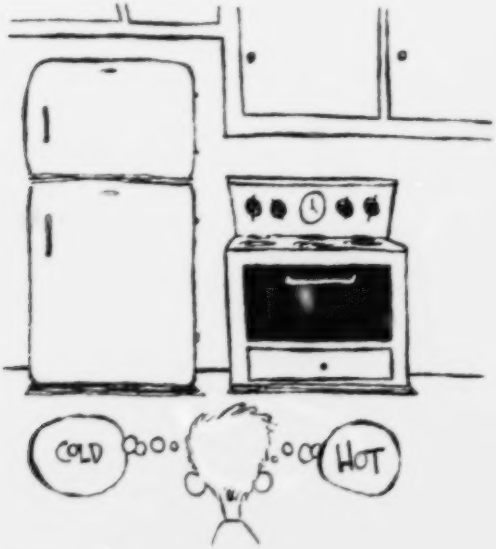
In the first sentence, fair refers to an event, to a meeting place. In the second, the word fair indicates something about the condition of our atmosphere. You can find examples of homonyms in newspapers, magazines, and on television.

You can also use newspapers, magazines, and television to search for words that have opposite meanings. Antonyms are related to one another by means of contrast. You've heard about the legendary feud between the Hatfields and McCoys? Antonyms are sort of like members of different families who don't get along because one of them always says and means exactly the opposite of the other.

You and your child can have a good time finding and substituting antonyms for words in television or magazine advertisements. For instance, your child might focus in on

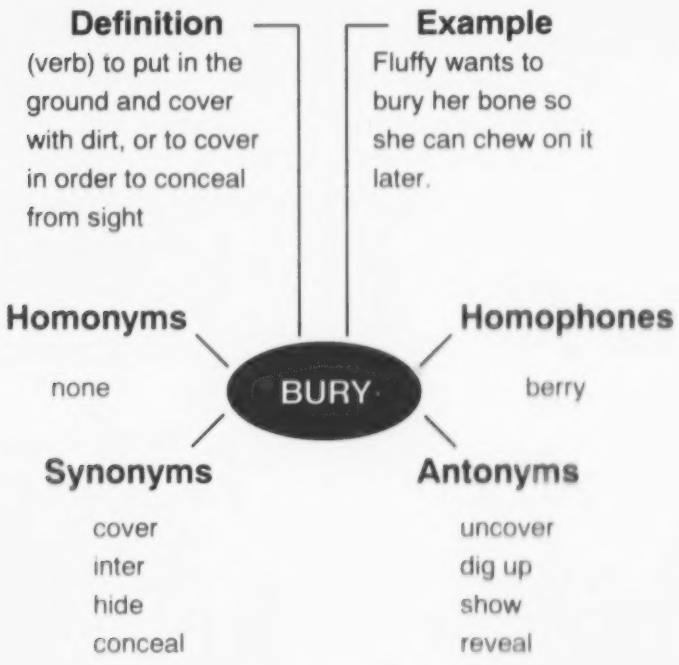
a current ad and change the caption "You've got the right one, baby. Uh huh!" to "You've got the wrong one, baby. Un uh!" The fun begins when you change the rest of the ad to match your new headline.

Children first learn antonyms when they learn that "up" is the opposite of "down"; "hot" is the opposite of "cold." From their earliest years, children enjoy playing with opposites (happy/sad, bright/dark, little/big, and so on). Exploring relationships of similarity and contrast is a way for children to relate a new word to one with which they are already familiar. Of course, the dictionary will help children discover synonyms, homophones, homonyms, and antonyms for these words.



As your child encounters unfamiliar words, you can help her incorporate them into her vocabulary by exploring the word relationships we've just talked about. One good way to do this is to help your child build word maps

which show her where the new word fits into her current vocabulary. Here's how to make a word map:



You can help your child expand her vocabulary by encouraging her curiosity about unfamiliar words. Suggest that she keep a list of these words. If you set up a "strange word list" in some prominent place in the house, guessing at and discussing the meanings of new words might become a family game. For instance, using magnets to stick a long piece of blank paper to the side of the refrigerator would do the trick. Let your child give this big piece of paper a title she finds descriptive (*Julie's Weird Word List, Billy's Unusual Words, Words You May Not Have Met Yet*). You and your child can write a new weird word on the sheet each time you pass the refrigerator.

When you are together, try to use the words in a sentence to show that you know what the word means. Use a dictionary to settle disagreements.

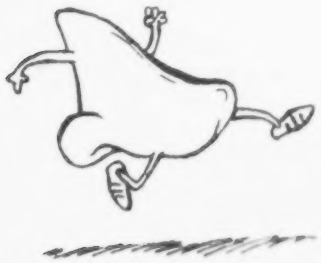
You can adapt all of these vocabulary-expanding techniques to your own child's age level and experience. When new words come up in conversation or when you and your child are reading books together, let your child know that developing a good vocabulary (and getting "smarter" in the process) is just a natural part of growing up.

Activities for Fun and Learning

Games, riddles, and books are enjoyable ways for children to enhance and expand their vocabularies. Try one of the following activities to share with your child.

Laughable Lingo

A fun way for children to learn or review homophones (sound-alike words) is to read one or more of the following books by Fred Gwynne: *A Chocolate Moose for Dinner, The King Who Rained, A Little Pigeon Toad, The Sixteen Hand Horse* (Simon and Schuster). These books illustrate some funny images a child envisions when hearing her parents talk. For example:



"a *running* nose"
"playing the piano by *ear*"
"three *feet* in a yard"
"*flush* a pheasant"

Help your child think of some more, and draw pictures to match.

Comical Combos

Many compound nouns (like sugar bowl, jelly roll, or bicycle shop) can be used comically as subjects and verbs. Using the second noun as a verb evokes amusing images. Try singing this song to the tune of "Have You Ever Seen a Lassie":

Have you ever seen a porch swing, *a* porch swing, *a* porch swing,

Have you ever seen a porch swing, *now you tell me one.*

Have you ever seen a ___ ___, *a* ___ ___, *a* ___ ___,

Have you ever seen a ___ ___, *now you tell me one.*

baseball bat	bicycle shop
sugar bowl	cake walk
jelly roll	fireside chat

Word Chains

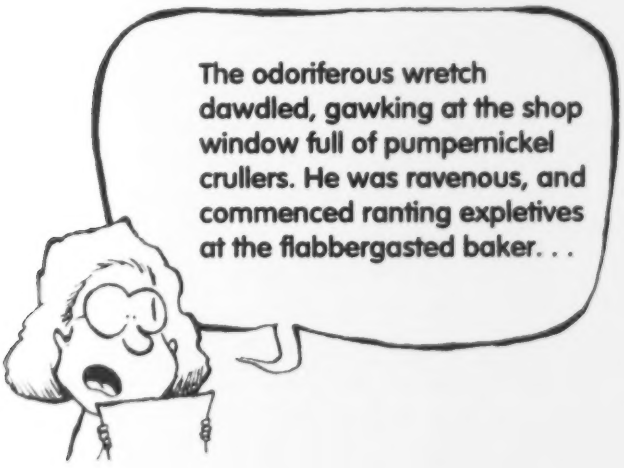
Help your child construct word chains using compound words. A compound word is one word made up of two words, like sunburn. In this activity, the last word in the compound word becomes the first word in the next word—sunburn, burnout, outside. A dictionary is useful for this activity.

Word-stock

Read books aloud to your child that have a higher level of vocabulary than books your child would read on his own. For example, *The Amazing Bone*, by William Steig, is a story about a little pig named Pearl. Children will enjoy the story and will understand the meaning of some of the more difficult words through context clues and pictures. Hearing the words will also make them more familiar to

your child, and you can discuss the meanings of the words together. Some words used in *The Amazing Bone* are:

dawdled	flabbergast	flourish
pumpernickel	wretch	commenced
crullers	ravenous	ranted
gawking	revile	embrace
gaffers	odoriferous	expletives


The odoriferous wretch dawdled, gawking at the shop window full of pumpernickel crullers. He was ravenous, and commenced ranting expletives at the flabbergasted baker. . .

Books for Parents

Expand Your Child's Vocabulary, by Carl B. Smith (Grayson Bernard). Includes twelve powerful vocabulary-building strategies parents can use to boost the word power of their school-age children. Together, parents and children can explore the world of context clues, analogies, synonyms and antonyms, word maps, Greek and Latin roots, word families, words from other languages, and more.

A Book of Puzzlements, by Herb Kohl. Full of games and activities for parents to share with their children. Includes ideas appropriate for all age groups.

A Child's Almanac of Words at Play. Contains puns, puzzles, nonsense poems, limericks, and word games. Includes one activity per day for a year.

Books for Parents and Children to Share

Ages 4–6

It Didn't Frighten Me! by Janet L. Goss and Jerome C. Harste (Willowisp Press). A child sees a variety of imaginary creatures in a tree outside of his bedroom window. He convinces himself that he is not afraid, until a real owl surprises him by looking in his window and hooting.

Old Black Fly, by Jim Aylesworth (Henry Holt). Spectacular drawings illustrate this animated tale about a fly causing havoc in a very colorful household. This is an alphabet book that introduces each letter through a lively story. Children enjoy repeating the refrain "Shoo fly! Shoo fly! Shoo!" while they listen.

Garden Animals and Farm Animals, by Lucy Cousins (Tambourine Books). These are sturdy board books which make page turning easy for young children. A garden or farm animal is represented on each page in words and illustration so that young readers can relate a visual image to written and spoken language.

One Yellow Lion, by Matthew Van Fleet (Dial Books). Contains different colored numerals from one to ten made out of lift-up flaps. Behind each flap are animals that correspond in color and sum to the appropriate numeral. Also includes large print words for colors and numbers.

My First Word Book: Seasons, by Anna Curti (Little, Brown). Large pictures show animals in various activities during different seasons of the year. Includes a short story at the top of each scene, and words label items in each picture.

Have You Seen My Cat? by Eric Carle. A young boy searching for his cat asks a variety a people if they have seen it. Several people show him cats they have found in their neighborhoods.

Ages 6–8

Seeing, Saying, Doing, Playing: A Big Book of Action Words, by Taro Gomi (Chronicle Books). Depicts almost 500 action verbs in colorful and diverse scenes. Children can identify the activity and see the word for it in print. Labels each action and provides a cumulative list of words in the back of the book for use in playing a search-and-find game.

The Cake that Mack Ate, by Rose Robart (Little, Brown). This tale is similar to "The House that Jack Built" in rhythm and pattern. The surprise ending will delight readers of all ages.

The Little Old Lady Who Was Not Afraid of Anything, by Linda Williams (HarperTrophy). While she is on a walk to collect herbs, spices, nuts, and seeds, spooky objects begin to follow a little old lady. When they can't frighten her, she must figure out something else for them to do to get them out of her way.

Herds of Words, by Patricia MacCarthy (Dial Books). Introduces named groups of people, objects, and animals. Reproductions of large, bright batik paintings illustrate the text.

Marms in the Marmalade, by Diana Morley (Carolrhoda). A unique and fun way to look at the English language. Causes readers to ponder the logic of words found within other words. Questions like "Is a **dent**ist covered with **dents**?" serve as a springboard to creative use of language.

All Aboard Overnight: A Book of Compound Words, by Betsy and Giulio Maestro. Defines and presents over fifty compound words in a story about a family taking a train trip. Compound words in the text are in bold print for easy location. Others are represented in picture format for the reader to find.

Ages 8–10

Hey, Hay! A Wagonful of Funny Homonym Riddles, by Marvin Terban (Clarion Books). This is a fun way for children to expand their vocabularies. Includes pairs and triplets, riddles, names, an index of homonyms used in the book, and a list of similar books about homonyms.

Cache of Jewels and Other Collective Nouns, by Ruth Heller. Presents in large, bold, colorful illustrations several different collective nouns. (A collective noun is a word that means a collection of things.) Includes a short descriptive explanation of collective nouns by the author.

The Amelia Bedelia series provides wacky examples of funny situations that occur when people interpret the English language in different ways. Amelia Bedelia is an endearing housekeeper who takes everything literally. Titles include: *Amelia Bedelia; Come Back, Amelia Bedelia; Good Work, Amelia Bedelia; Amelia Bedelia and the Baby; Amelia Bedelia Goes Camping,* and *Merry Christmas, Amelia Bedelia.*

Too Hot to Hoot: Funny Palindrome Riddles, by Marvin Terban. Readers can survey a variety of palindromes which are words or phrases that are spelled the same forward and backward (for example, mom, pop, madam, level, and radar). After reading these examples, children can create their own palindromes.

Murfles and Wink-a-Peeps: Funny Old Words for Kids, by Susan Delz Sperling. Defines over 50 obsolete words and links them to vocabulary that children use today. Helps show how vocabulary changes over time.

Funny Side Up! by Mike Thaler. Instructs readers how to write riddles. Encourages children to use a dictionary, thesaurus, and other resources to write riddles.

5

Exploring Your Neighborhood and Beyond

Getting out and about is one way to encourage active learning in your child. You can help your child take charge of her own learning by becoming a mutual explorer with her. Exploring your neighborhood and beyond can help your child experience the thrill of discovery, which is such an essential part of active learning. Geographers, scientists, astronauts, and artists all experience the thrill of discovery as they explore new worlds or creative frontiers. For children, their own neighborhood can present a real-life geography lesson complete with many opportunities for active learning.

Going Places

Whenever your family goes places, you are helping your children learn geography. Whenever you take walks through the neighborhood, point out car license plates from different states, or visit a relative in another town, you are teaching your child about geography. Geography is literally all around us.

Geographers, whose job it is to study the earth, investigate answers to five main questions:

1. Where are things located?
2. What makes a place special?
3. What are the relationships between people and the places where they live?
4. What are the patterns of movement of people, products, and information?
5. How can the earth be divided into regions for study?

By helping your child apply these basic questions to your everyday experiences, you stimulate her interest in geography and her understanding of the world in which she lives.

Making a map of her room, her house, her neighborhood or city can help your child begin to see where one place is in relation to another. Help your child make a map of your town that includes places of interest to her. By helping her see where your house is located in relation to Grandma's or Uncle George's, you can build your child's confidence in her ability to make her way through her own community.

Geographers talk about location by referring to latitude and longitude. Before trying to explain to a kid what the latitude or longitude lines on a world globe or map mean, begin by illustrating how fancy words like longitude and latitude relate to more basic terms about

place. Young children easily learn positional words like above and below when adults regularly use these words in directions. When you tell your child that he will find a washcloth on the shelf above the towels, you are teaching him how to locate things in his environment. When you tell your child to put the silverware away in the drawer that is to the right of the stove, you are helping him learn how to find his way around in unfamiliar surroundings.

Learning what right and left mean is the first step toward learning how to use directional terms like north, south, east, and west that will allow your child to effectively use maps and globes. You can begin to teach these terms to your child by using your house as a reference point. Help her figure out which way is east by telling her the sun comes up in the east and asking which window the morning sun shines through. Then you can help her figure out which way is west by watching which windows catch the light of the setting sun. You might also find it interesting to help older children check a map or globe for the longitude and latitude of the place where you live.

Every Place Has a Personality

Just like people, places have their own special characteristics. Every place has its own personality, and learning about those personalities is part of learning about geography. What are the physical and cultural characteristics of your neighborhood? What animals live there? What plants grow there? What is the landscape like? What kinds of things are made or sold there? What neighborhoods are different than or similar to your own? What makes your neighborhood special? These are the sorts of questions your child must answer when she writes a report about exotic places for her social studies class. She might find it fun (and good practice for writing social studies reports) to apply these questions to her own community.

Geographers divide the earth into two different regions for study: physical regions and cultural regions. You can help your children understand how physical regions or environments influence what happens in a place just by examining the physical regions in your home. Is there an upstairs and a downstairs? An eating area and a sleeping area? What other regions are there in your home? Look at the physical regions in your community. Do factory, waterfront, commercial or recreational regions exist in your hometown? When you discuss these things with your children, it's a small jump then to talk about larger physical regions or continents like Asia or South America.

Our Environment and Us

Studying how people adapt to and deal with their environments is another part of geography. What would happen if no one ever cleaned your house or took out the trash? Every family—human or animal—exerts some

control over its home environment. We control our environments when we mow our grass, heat or air condition our houses, or clean up a room. We adapt to our environment when we wear raincoats during the wet season or put on a hat if we are going to be out in the hot summer sun.

Environmentalists get concerned when they think we don't make a large enough attempt to adapt to our environment. They worry that we don't take care of it in the right way. Walking your children around a park in your neighborhood and talking about the need to clean up litter will raise the question of how to dispose of waste. A trip to the local landfill, junkyard, or recycling center will illustrate how the disposal of waste is really an environmental problem. Here's a list of other activities you and your child can use to further explore your neighborhood and beyond.

Activities for Fun and Learning

Going places

Geographers are always interested in how people get where they want to go. Do people in a given place usually travel by car, by foot, on the bus, or by boat to visit or do business with one another? How do you and your children usually get from place to place? Use a map to see how you might take various routes or use a different form of transportation to go somewhere. Take a discovery trip together by going somewhere in your area using a different route or form of transportation.

How did that get here?

You can follow the movement of people and things by examining the labels on your clothes and then finding those places on a map or globe. What route did your kids' jeans or shirts follow to get to the store where you bought them? You can also investigate geography by

checking food labels and talking about where your food comes from. Why do bananas come all the way from South America instead of from your local orchard?

Chart your family's migrations

Conversations about your family origins will give you and your child a chance to discuss the ways and reasons people move from place to place. Where were your relatives born? Find those places on a map and discuss how your family members came to live where they do today. Most children are fascinated by stories about where their ancestors came from; they love hearing about why great- (or great-great-great) grandfather decided to leave his original home.

Take your children to visit older relatives and invite these relatives to tell stories from "the olden days" about how and where they traveled. Tracing their grandparents' or great-grandparents' or great-great-grandparents' travels on a map would probably be an enjoyable experience for your family. Your children might even have fun writing their own stories, complete with maps, about how their family came to live in the place they now call home.

See which way the wind blows

Weather affects the personality of a place. The amount of sun or rain, the direction and strength of the wind, and the severity of the summers and winters make a big difference in where people live, how they grow their food, and what kinds of clothes they wear. Meteorologists use a variety of tools to study the weather and make weather forecasts. One of these tools is the weather vane. You can make your own weather vane out of everyday items. You will need:

- a wire coat hanger
- some aluminum foil

- a small, lidded, plastic container like a margarine tub
- sand or dirt
- tape or glue
- scissors
- a crayon

Begin by straightening out the hanger's hook and covering half the hanger with foil. Fold the edges of the foil around the hanger and tape or glue the foil in place. Then fill the tub with sand or dirt, mark the lid with N, S, E, and W at the edges, and put the lid on the tub. Poke the hanger through the center of the lid so that it touches the bottom of the tub and turns freely in the hole. Put the container outside with the N facing north and then watch it to see which way the wind is blowing.

Keep a family travel log

Make a scrapbook of your family vacations that includes maps, snapshots, and postcards from the places you have visited. Ask each of your family members to contribute a description of the trip that you can add to the scrapbook.

Geographers travel all around the world to study foreign cultures. But you and your child don't have to go any further than your local library to visit a different region or experience a different culture. Reading a book with your child can be like taking a magic carpet ride. It can let you travel to exotic places and learn about how other people live—even though you never leave your hometown. On the following pages you will find a list of books that will let you and your child go to new and interesting places and share adventures with the people who live there.

Books for Parents

Eyeopeners! How to Choose and Use Children's Books about Real People, Places, and Things, by Beverly Kobrin. A guide to over 500 nonfiction books. An easy-to-use index aids in location of books about history. Also includes tips for book selection, book-based activities, and ideas to nurture reading.

Trouble-Free Travel with Children: Helpful Hints for Parents on the Go, by Vicki Lansky. This book is full of parent-tested ideas that can work for you when traveling with children. Included is resource information that will help parents survive and even enjoy getting there and back. Tips on planning and packing, sleeping-away advice, eating out, traveling abroad, entertaining kids, and tips for planes, trains, and automobiles.

Family Travel, by Evelyn Kaye. A gold mine of exciting, unusual, and affordable vacation ideas for parents, children, teenagers, and grandparents, this book tells you exactly how to find these and many more exciting new vacations. A complete travel guide for today's families.

Taking off: Travel Tips for a Carefree Trip, by Joanne E. Bernstein with illustrations by Kathie Abrams. This concise, well-organized guide can start you off on the right track if you need help when traveling. It provides hundreds of useful travel tips to help you have a worry-free journey to the next town—or even around the world.

Books for Parents and Children to Share

Ages 4–6

When We Went to the Park, by Shirley Hughes. A little girl and her grandpa go to the park to watch the

daily activities. Children and adults are running, jogging, playing ball, and feeding the animals.

Oh, the Places You'll Go! by Dr. Seuss. Parents will find this book the perfect send-off for children starting out in the maze of life, be they nursery school grads or medical school achievers. Everyone will find it inspired good fun.

Jessie's Journey, by Angela McAllister with illustrations by Anne Magill. A little girl is about to embark on a journey. She wonders what the trip will be like. But when it's time to depart, Jessie finds it even more exciting than she imagined. Nothing could be more thrilling than a train trip from the big station through the cities and countryside to visit her grandfather by the sea.

The Travels of Babar, by Jean De Brunhoff. Babar and his bride Celeste start on an aerial honeymoon. Their balloon is wrecked on a cannibal island; but the most famous little elephant, Babar, triumphs over great odds to save his bride and return them both to safety.

Anno's Journey, by Mitsumasa Anno. Join Anno on his journey through villages, towns, and cities as you meet everyday children and adults busy at their work or play. As you travel with Anno you will see new stories without words unfold from page to page as you extend your imagination and creativity.

When I Was Young in the Mountains, by Cynthia Rylant. Relates fond memories of a young girl's Appalachian childhood through amusing, yet loving, text and warm paintings. Children can observe a way of life from another era and sample a bit of Appalachian culture.

Ages 6–8

Jenny's Journey, by Sheila Samton. Jenny imagines an eventful voyage to visit her friend who has moved away. Go along with Jenny as she faces the thrills and disappointments along the way.

The Incredible Journey, by Sheila Burnford. The courageous, heartwarming story of three runaway pets. Instinct told them the way home lay to the west, so the labrador retriever, the bull terrier, and the Siamese set out through the Canadian wilderness to find their way home. Together, the three house pets face many obstacles on their way home to the family they love. This book was also made into a children's movie.

Chitty-Chitty-Bang-Bang, by Ian Fleming with illustrations by John Burningham. Adventure follows adventure when the Pott's previously mild-mannered automobile becomes a flying machine that takes them on an adventure that they will never forget. This story is full of global ambition and fun that every child will enjoy reading again and again.

Abel's Island, by William Steig. A very proper mouse named Abel, in the simple act of rescuing his wife's scarf, ends up stranded for a year on an island. This tale is full of wit and humor as you follow the adventures of Abel on the Island.

The Journey Home, by Alison Lester. Wild and Wooly dig a hole in their sand pit, fall through it, and land at the North Pole. As they journey back home they go to many enchanted places and meet lots of unique people.

Ages 8–10

A Wrinkle in Time, by Madeline L'Engle. The story of Meg Murry, her brother, Charles Wallace and their friend, Calvin O'Keefe who search the uni-

verse for Meg's father while battling the evils of IT. Go along with the children as they travel through time meeting different people and visiting unfamiliar places along the way in their quest to bring father home.

The Lion, the Witch, & the Wardrobe, by C. S. Lewis. The story of four children who travel to another world through the wardrobe in the upstairs bedroom. Their adventure takes them into the land of Narnia which has been frozen by the evil witch for eternity. With the help of the great lion, the children must fight to save Narnia and return it to the beautiful land it once was.

Around the World in Eighty Days, by George Makepeace with illustrations by Barry Moses. An 1829 world map surrounds the pages of this timeless classic about a wealthy, independent man named Phileas Fogg who makes a bet that he can circle the globe in eighty days and arrive back in London on Saturday, December 2, 1872. Phileas and his servant, Passepartout, travel by train, steamship, carriage, yacht, elephant, and sled in this classic adventure.

6

Participating in Your Community

Working with others to solve a problem involves kids in active learning that makes a difference. Many people call this kind of active learning "service learning." Service learning is a new term for an old idea. Young people used to learn how to cooperate with others to get an important job done because that's how work was accomplished on the farm or in small communities where everybody knew everybody else. Children used to learn how to become mature and responsible citizens by helping grandparents and neighbors because these children had been raised to feel a sense of responsibility to others. Although our family structure has changed, and most people no longer live in the neighborhoods where their grandparents grew up, we can still help our children learn how to be good, responsible citizens. We can

help them see that their work, their ideas, and their concern for others can make a real difference.

Since young children usually see school as their first "community," school is a great place for children to undertake their first social action projects. All across the country kids are doing just that. For instance, in one community, 135 seventh-grade students "adopted" a nearby park. They cleaned up the litter in it and then they set about raising the consciousness of the community about littering and taking care of the park. These kids really engaged in service learning. They did some community education by sending out news releases to local newspapers and TV stations. They also made signs and wrote and duplicated a park guidebook that showed people how to use and take care of the park.

Real-World Problem Solving

Other schools are putting the idea of student government and the democratic process to work for them in a

real and useful way. The Cottage Lane Elementary school in Blauvelt, New York established a Student Advisory Council to address problems the school was experiencing. This active participation in their school community gave the Cottage Lane kids a better understanding of how their local, state, and federal government solves public problems. In Tucson, Arizona an elementary school invites senior citizens to a weekly lunch program called "The Pleasure of Your Company." And in the Los Angeles Unified School District, students assist in adult literacy tutoring, volunteer with the Red Cross, tutor in after-school "latchkey" programs, and paint over graffiti.

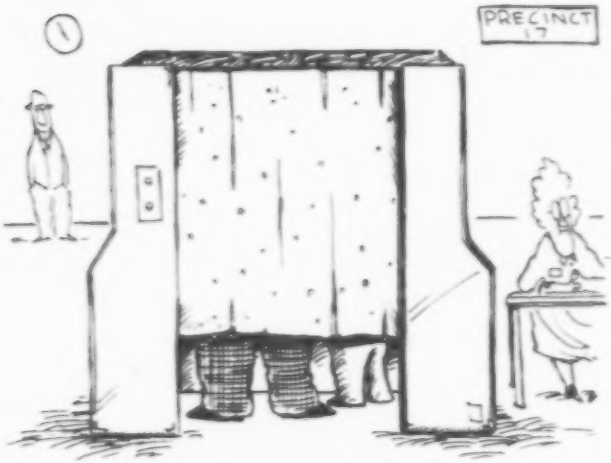
Social action means that kids extend their efforts beyond their own homes and classrooms into the "real world." They undertake projects that aren't required of them and try to improve the quality of life around them. Why don't you try to be an adult that advances opportunities for service learning in your family.

What Parents Can Do

Children first learn about the value of cooperation, about working with others to achieve a common goal, and about enjoying their own rights while respecting the rights of others by being part of a family. Lessons learned at home are likely to have a big influence on the kind of citizen a child grows up to become. Here are just a few of the actions you can take to help teach your children how to become productive and reliable citizens.

- **Set a good example.** Let your children know how seriously you take your responsibility to be informed about the issues and to participate in the democratic process by going to the polls and voting on election day. Set an example for your child by participating in

her school community. If you are actively involved in your child's school activities and in parent/teacher councils, you send her a clear message that being part of any group or community entails responsibility to make the community a better place.



- **Show your child how democracy works.** Starting conversations at the dinner table or in response to TV programs or reports about current events can be a great way to teach your children about what it means to be part of a democracy. You might even invite your child to express her views on a particularly important issue by writing a letter to the editor of your local newspaper about an issue of special concern to her.
- **Put the democratic process into practice in your own family.** Some important decisions just can't be made by giving everyone a say in the matter. But there are other things that can be decided by giving each family member a vote. Many families have regular family conferences in which everybody dis-

cusses important decisions and issues that affect the family. You can give children a sense of what it means to be part of a group and to engage in group decision making by giving them a vote in decisions about family activities such as where the family will take its next vacation, or who is responsible for what household chore. Family conferences can also be a great place to discuss household rules and individual rights and to air grievances in a peaceful way.

- Require your children to do duties or chores at home. Be sure your children know that their work makes a valuable contribution to the household and contributes to the common good of the family.

By Helping Others, Children Also Help Themselves

We hear much talk these days about at-risk kids—kids who are dropping out of school, running away from home, getting addicted to drugs, becoming teenaged parents. These alienated teenagers feel out of place in a world where they can no longer be treated as children, but they also know that they are not quite ready to assume all of the responsibilities that go along with being real adults.

The "us-versus-them" attitude that so many parents perceive in their teenagers has come to be known as the generation gap. But when young people feel responsible for and become involved in their own communities, the "us versus them" attitudes so many young folks have is often replaced by new perceptions and understanding. Research bears this out. The Search Institute in Minneapolis conducted a study that involved nearly 47,000 young people in grades 6–12. The Institute wanted to see if service learning had any bearing on kids'

behavior problems. Their study revealed that as little as one hour per week of community service lowered adolescents' risk of substance abuse, decreased the dropout rate, and cut down the incidence of adolescent pregnancy.

Service learning is a way to both bridge the generation gap and give young people firsthand experience of the responsibilities adult maturity entails. It makes kids feel they can create their own future. You can help your child believe in her ability to create her own future by helping her make up her own proclamation for social action (see page 80).

Activities for Fun and Learning

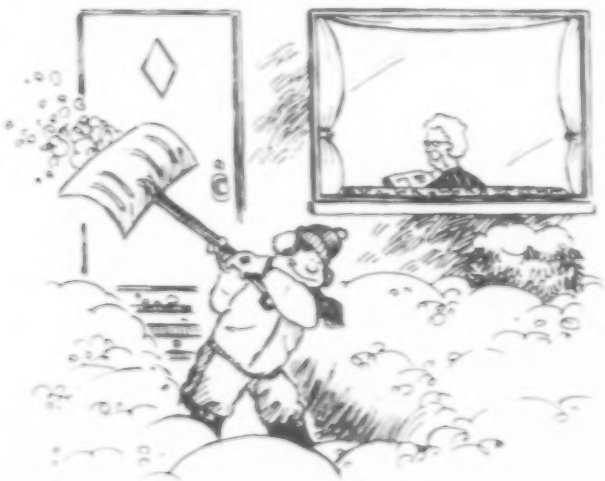
Look around your community and help your child find a service learning opportunity that suits her interests. Check out your local newspaper for information about cleanup, beautification, or recycling activities in your neighborhood. Starting or becoming part of a peer tutoring program for kids with special needs or learning problems might be a rewarding project for you and your child. Most public libraries are eager to have volunteers, and every community contains older people who would appreciate occasional help or companionship from young folks.

But what volunteer activities are best for your child? Research done by social scientists points out six characteristics of good service learning programs. Your child will get the most out of volunteer efforts that measure up to these guidelines.

- Community service should meet real needs and involve work that both children and the community at large recognize as worthwhile.
- Community service should have real consequences. Children's volunteer work should make an impact—

they need to be made aware that other people are benefitting from their efforts.

- Community service must present real challenges by putting children in new roles, placing them in new environments, and calling upon them to develop and use new skills as well as old ones.
- Community service must require that children take on a sense of personal responsibility and engage in decision making. The best volunteer programs give children a sense of "being in charge" of some part of a project.
- Community service should ideally require children to work in cooperation with people of a variety of ages—with adults and with their own peers.
- Children benefit most from community service when they are encouraged to reflect on their service learning experiences through ongoing discussion or in writing.



Proclamation for Kids

Create Your Own Future

Whereas, You are capable of thinking and solving real problems, you should not allow adults (or anyone else) to put you down. Don't pay attention to those who say you can't succeed if you're poor, uneducated, or disabled, or because you're a minority, a girl, or a child. Don't get trapped by those chilling excuses. They can make you numb. You *can* succeed.

Whereas, You can make a difference in the world, don't listen to those who insist it's too late to breathe fresh air, control neighborhood gangs, save the rain forests, save the whales, combat drug abuse, and create world peace. It's only too late when *you* stop believing in the future.

Whereas, You can find your own problems and design your own solutions, be suspicious of anyone who "gives" you a problem to solve or wants you to resolve a pet project. Decide what you want to work on, then invite others to join *your* team.

Whereas, You should not feel responsible for solving all the world's problems while you're still a kid, neither should you feel excluded from creating solutions. Don't be swayed by people who say you're "too young," that you should spend these years dreaming and just being a kid. Remind them of how it feels to be powerless. They will remember. The ability to solve problems doesn't belong just to adults—and the ability to dream doesn't belong just to kids.

Whereas, You have the right to shape your future, don't wait for someone else to do it for you. Speak up. Speak out. Design a world you want to live in. Don't wait for luck to create it. Luck is just another word for work. The world needs to see your works and to hear your voices.

Now, therefore, Be it resolved that the Decade of the Nineties shall be proclaimed as:

The Kid's Decade for Social Action

for all kids who believe in themselves, each other, and the future. Don't *allow* life to happen. *Make* it happen!

SIGNED AND SEALED this day _____

_____

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Books for Parents

Lend a Hand: The How, Where, and Why of Volunteering, by Sara Gilbert. This comprehensive guidebook for parents lists more than a hundred national and international groups that welcome young volunteers. Arranged in fifteen categories of involvement, the range of opportunities for volunteering is described extensively.

1000 Facts about the Earth, by Moira Butterfield. Fun and informative, this book is crammed with facts about volcanoes, rivers, deserts, rainforests, mountains, oceans, and the weather—plus it all takes place right inside our planet! Parents will enjoy using this book with their children to teach them about the planet they live on and ways that they can protect the Earth.

Earth Child: Games, Stories, Activities, Experiments & Ideas about Living Lightly on Planet Earth, by Kathryn Sheehan and Mary Waidner. This guide is designed to help adults share with children the wonder that a deep awareness of their environment can bring. Included are suggestions, games, facts, recipes, and activities for preschool and elementary kids.

The Kids Can Help Book: Lend a Hand, Volunteer, Share a Skill, Make a Difference, by Suzanne Logan. Filled with many resources to get your child involved in community service and volunteering, this book also includes information on community resources that parents can use when helping kids choose the right area to volunteer.

Hands around the World 365 Ways to Build Cultural Awareness & Global Respect, by Susan Milford. A resource guide for parents to use with children. Children can experience, taste, and embrace the daily lives of children from the far corners of the

earth. They will learn to plant and grow, write and tell stories, draw and craft, and cook and eat as they learn to live in an atmosphere of global respect and cultural awareness.

Books for Parents and Children to Share

Ages 4–6

The Furry News: How to Make a Newspaper, by Loreen Leedy. Big Bear appoints himself as the publisher of the city paper when he discovers that none of the articles are about their neighborhood. He assigns jobs to his animal friends and they hurry to gather information, write news and feature stories, and print the *Furry News* by the deadline. Children will learn how to create their own newspaper and get involved in their community.

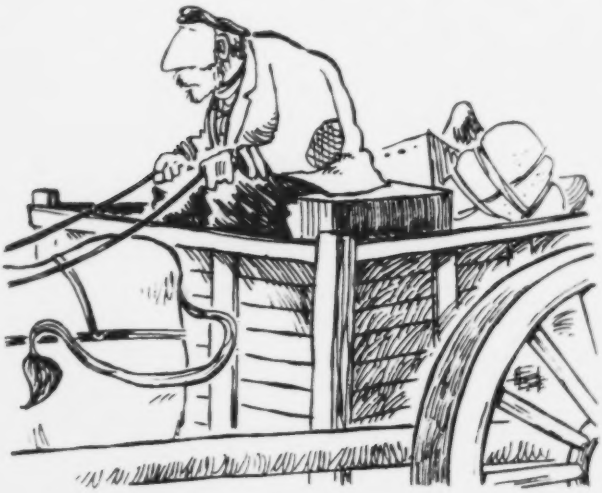
The Magic School Bus Inside the Earth, by Joanna Cole with illustrations by Bruce Degen. Rock collecting on their class trip, Ms. Frizzle's crew digs right through the Earth, identifying sedimentary, metamorphic, and igneous rocks all the way. At the end of their journey there is a section of dialogue called "A Word with the Author and the Artist" to read aloud with children.

The Green Magician Puzzle, by Susan Pearson with illustrations by Gioia Fiammenghi. Ernie and her classmates must solve a series of riddles to become the Green Magicians of the Earth Day parade. Read along as the group tries to discover how to solve the riddles given to them.

Kids for Saving the Earth Guidebook, by Target. This informative book tells how to join this kids' organization or start your own KSE neighborhood club. Environmental information and activities are also included in this guidebook.

Ages 6–8

The Ox-Cart Man, by Donald Hall with illustrations by Barbara Cooney. This story is about a New England family whose well-being depends on making sure nothing is wasted. Travel with the family as they take their goods to market to sell and their return home. Environmental themes such as interdependence, living in harmony with nature, and recycling can be incorporated into discussions about this story.



Celebrating Earth Day: A Sourcebook of Activities and Experiments, by Robert Gardner. This book is a good source for discussion on issues concerning global problems such as conservation and overpopulation. Included are experiments that children can use to explore these issues in more detail.

Ecology, by Susan Diffenderfer. A hands-on book full of activities that children can use for self-directed learning about ecology and their environment.

50 Simple Things Kids Can Do to Save the Earth, by John Javna and The Earthworks Group. This book is full of facts, experiments, and exciting things that children can do to save the Earth and the environment around them. Simple illustrations and ideas are presented for children to use and understand.

How Green Are You? by David Bellamy. Kids and their families can use this guide to learn how to save energy, protect wildlife, and reduce pollution. Suggests activities for children and parents to do together to help save their environment.

Ages 8–10

The Kid's Guide to Social Action, by Barbara A. Lewis. This book offers useful guidelines to help kids become involved in their community. Children will learn how to turn their creative ideas into action. Included are topics on fundraising ideas, an up-to-date resource guide with addresses and phone numbers, and material and learning resources that can be used for all sorts of fun projects.

Who Cares: A Journal of Service and Action. A magazine for the youth service movement that seeks to "inform, provoke, and inspire nonprofit professionals, students, activists and volunteers across the country."

Save the Earth: An Action Handbook for Kids, by Betty Miles. Provides information about land, water, atmosphere, energy, plants, animals, and people, and the effects each one has on the entire environment. Gives several projects that children can do to help save the earth.

7

Active Television Viewing

Did you know that most children spend at least twenty-five hours a week watching television? That's the equivalent of a halftime job for an adult! By the time an average teenager graduates from high school, she has spent approximately 3,000 more hours in front of the tube than she has in school. What effect does all this TV time have on our children?

TV viewing can cut into time kids should be spending actively developing their minds and bodies rather than passively absorbing TV images. Parents may worry that their youngsters are being exposed to too much sex, violence, and hard-sell advertising. Certainly these concerns are valid. However, parents who are willing to take an active role in their children's TV viewing can turn the detrimental effects TV has on kids into positive influences.

Television and School Performance

Parents are concerned—with good reason—about the influence TV can have on kids' academic achievement. A study of the effect television viewing has on children's school performance revealed that the amount of time kids spend watching TV definitely influences their ability to do well in school.

But you may be surprised to hear that TV's influence is not all bad. In small doses, television viewing can stimulate learning when parents take care to monitor kids TV time and discuss programs with them. Studies have shown that kids who watched one to ten hours of TV a week learned better than those students who viewed no TV at all. But an increase in viewing time beyond ten hours results in lower grades for kids. Research reveals that students who watched television eleven to thirty-five hours a week showed declining achievement levels.

What Parents Can Do

Clearly, unplugging the TV set is not the best answer; nor is such action likely to result in family harmony. Experts agree that parents can use TV as a tool for learning and for spending quality time with their kids simply by following a few simple guidelines.

1. Set your child's TV viewing schedule. It is a good idea to limit children's TV viewing to eight or ten hours a week. Make time to sit with your kids on Saturdays or Sundays, go over the TV listings for the week, and discuss what your children want to watch. Teach selective viewing: get your kids in the habit of using a television guide to make some judgments before they switch on the TV set. You might even want to write the schedule down so you can share it with daycare personnel, sitters, or relatives who

will be caring for your children when the programs they have chosen are televised.

Your weekly viewing schedule will serve as a guide, but don't expect your kids to follow it to the letter. They may forget now and then, or they may be tempted to watch other shows they've heard about. You will be more effective if you provide guidance rather than making ironclad rules that cause resentment.

2. Get involved in what your child watches. Show an interest in your children's TV viewing by talking with them about the shows they watch. You can use TV as a tool for discovery and as a springboard for quality-time discussions. Your "TV talks" will be more two-sided and rewarding if you ask open-ended questions like the following ones: "Which character do you like best on that show? Why?" "Do you think things like that happen in real life? Can you think of some examples?" "What do you think you

would do if you were in a situation like that?" "Which part of the show did you like best? Why?" "What do you think about the way that family lives? Do you think you would be comfortable in a family like that?" "Can you think of a better way for the story to end?" "Why do you think that character acts that way (silly, dumb, violent, nasty, thoughtless)? Do you think someone like that can change the way he behaves?"

3. Use TV to spur kids' interest in reading. A few years ago, the Public Broadcasting System surveyed librarians to see if PBS shows such as Reading Rainbow influence kids' interest in books. Ninety-five percent of the librarians surveyed about Reading Rainbow responded that the series stimulates children's interest in reading. Science and nature programs can serve a similar purpose by leading children to books, especially if an adult helps stimulate the child's curiosity and helps her find answers to her questions.

4. Use TV to promote writing. Here's another way to counteract passive TV viewing. Point out to your child that no show ever gets on television without writers. Ask your child to compose a description of a TV program, or ask her to write a scene that extends or changes a show she has watched that week.

Older children might enjoy writing reviews that evaluate a program. Or they might compose a new episode for one of their favorite TV series and then act out the episodes for friends and family. Such activities may even help reduce tension over school writing projects.

Young children will enjoy drawing pictures of what they have seen on TV. Their pictures can serve as a springboard to talks with adults about what they learn from TV and how they feel about what they see.

5. Use TV to explore the world. Television provides the most fantastic scientific field trips and geographical explorations most of us will ever take. It gives us a chance to visit exotic places, see unusual creatures, explore the solar system, and swim across the ocean floor. If you keep an atlas or globe near the TV set, you can help your children locate the places referred to on the programs. This can be a real boost for kids' school performance in an era when most teachers lament their students' ignorance of geography. The library will offer further information about the intriguing places, people, and creatures your family encounters on their TV "excursions."

How Kids Understand TV

Parents who take an active role in their kids' TV viewing will probably need to consider how kids of different ages make sense of what they see on TV. Until the age of eleven or so, children understand what they see on TV in a much different way than adults do. See if the following descriptions reflect your child's understanding of TV.

Ages two to five: Confusion between reality and fantasy is common for most two- to five-year-olds. Thus, kids of this age tend to think TV programs are real. For instance, they believe people can fly just like Superman. Because young children see a show as a sequence of separate incidents and are not yet very good at following a story line, they do not mentally separate commercials from the TV shows that surround them. They see the commercials as part of the story portrayed on the show. Children of this age enjoy repetition and love watching the same show again and again.

Because most small children respond to their environments in an all-or-nothing manner, they perceive television characters as either all good or all bad, with no grey areas. They may, for instance, think all cowboys are good and all Indians are bad.

Ages six to eleven or twelve: Kids show a gradual increase in their ability to understand a plot as they grow older. Most six-year-olds understand the story line of a TV program: they can retrace the events they have seen, guess what might happen next, and then predict how the show will end. Thus, six-to-eight-year-olds love programs that follow simple, predictable formats and allow them to anticipate what will happen next.

Through the age of nine, kids tend to focus on the concrete, physical behavior of actors. At around age ten, they become more sensitive to the feelings and motivations of characters.

Ages twelve and older: Researchers seem to agree that adolescents aged twelve and older understand TV

in the way most adults do. Kids of this age use TV, in part, to enhance their social skills. Adolescents say they watch programs like *Home Improvement* and *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* for two reasons: so they can talk about it with their peers and because the show helps them learn new social behavior such as asking for a date, being popular, or getting along with parents.

Most researchers who study the effects TV has on kids agree that television can be a wonderful addition to family interaction and to a child's learning process under two conditions: that the parent limit the child's viewing time and that parent and child watch and talk about programs together. Parents prepared to let their kids view TV representations of reality without comment have only themselves to blame if their children begin to accept TV values over parental standards.

Activities for Fun and Learning

Rate the shows

Keep your own rating chart next to the TV set. Each night you can sit with your child and list the programs he watched that day. Let your child rate the programs on a one-to-five-point scale from "disliked very much" to "liked very much." Then ask your child what he learned from watching that program.

What's in a superhero?

With your children, list the superhuman powers they find appealing. What characteristics do superheroes have that your kids want to imitate? Watch and discuss some superhero shows with your kids, and then use their interest in superheroes to turn to books. Discover the world of classic "superheroes" by reading *Adventures of the Greek Heroes*, by Mollie McLean and Ann Wiseman (Houghton Mifflin, 1973); *Tales of the North American*

Indians, by Stith Thompson (Harvard University Press, 1966); *Time-Ago Lost: More Tales of Jadhu*, by Virginia Hamilton (Macmillan, 1973); or *World Folktales*, by Atelia Clarkson & Gilbert Cross (Scribners & Sons, 1980).

What's in an ad?

Encourage your children to become more critical of TV commercials by talking with them about what the commercial is trying to get them to do. Asking questions such as "What are these folks trying to make you believe?" will encourage critical judgments.

Evaluate advertising claims by helping your child try out and compare two similar products that are both hyped as better than one another in TV ads. Encouraging your child to write his own commercial for a new product (glow-in-the-dark toothpaste, a motorized skateboard or a banana-flavored soft drink) can also offer further insight into the advertising game.

Books for Parents

The Family Guide to Children's Television, by Evelyn Kaye. This book is a helpful guide for parents instructing their children what to watch, what to miss, and what to change. Included are helpful tips on how to develop wise television viewing within the home.

Television: How to Use It Wisely with Children, by Josette Frank. Parents can give pertinent and perceptive suggestions on television viewing by using the hints this guide offers on how to wisely choose what your children watch on television.

Books for Parents and Children to Share

Ages 4–6

The Berenstain Bears and Too Much TV, by Stan and Jan Berenstain. Concerned that the family is spending too much time in front of the television and neglecting other activities, Mama Bear decides that there will be no television viewing for one week.

The Bionic Bunny Show, by Marc Brown. An ordinary rabbit becomes a super TV star thanks to makeup magic. Children will find this story delightful as they follow the bionic bunny through his adventures in the world of TV.

Nibble, Nibble, Jenny Archer, by Ellen Conford with illustrations by Diane Palmisciano. Jenny Archer is about to make her break on TV, but in a commercial where she is eating gerbil food. A very funny story that will keep children laughing as they read on to find out how Jenny solves this dilemma.

The TV Kid, by Betsy Byars with illustrations by Richard Cuffari. A young boy, in his loneliness, escapes

into the world of television watching and soon he has difficulty distinguishing fact from fiction.

My Co-Star, My Enemy, by Ilene Cooper. Alison discovers that her co-star on a TV series is out to sabotage her. Read on about how Alison finds a solution to her problem.

What Happens at a Television Station, by Arthur Shay. A behind-the-scenes look into television that children in the lower grades will find useful when they begin to wonder how TV programs fly through the air from the studio to their home.

Ages 6–8

The Secret Life of the Underwear Champ, by Dan Jones. Larry finds himself about to make a TV commercial for ChampWin Knitting Mills, makers of sports clothing and underwear. Follow Larry's adventures as his commercial airs, his friends tease him, and he hits the winning home run for his baseball team. Larry becomes the true underwear champ.

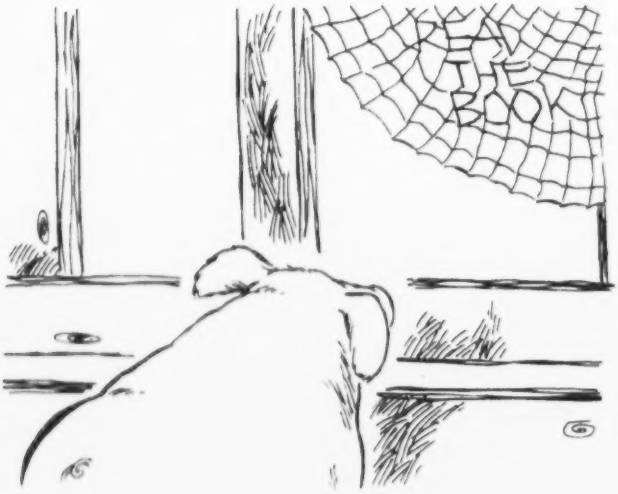
It's New! It's Improved! It's Terrible, by Stephen Manes. An alien who looks like a boy talks constantly about TV commercials and is driving Arnold and his buddies bonkers. Read and find out how Arnold and his buddies learn to communicate with the alien and how they all become friends.

Eureka! It's Television, by Jeanne Bendick & Robert Bendick. This book teaches children about the invention of television. It talks about the light around us, how we see things with our eyes, what we hear, the earth's magnetic field, and sound and light waves. Includes a discussion on how putting all these things together enables a TV show to be broadcast and transmitted through a satellite into your home.

Germy Blew It! by Rebecca C. Jones. Germy's organizational talents prove insufficient, until he misses a chance to be on a local TV show. Germy finds a way to make up for his mishap and gets another chance.

Ages 8–10

Charlotte's Web, by E.B. White. A web-writing spider named Charlotte spells out messages in her web that help save the life of Wilbur the pig. Along the way, Charlotte and Wilbur get some help from the other barnyard animals in this children's classic.



Almost Starring Skinnybones, by Barbara Park. "Skinnybones" Frankovitch doesn't get the celebrity status he envisions when he wins a contest to star in a TV commercial. See how Skinnybones handles his situation.

Old Yeller, by Fred Gipson. A stray dog becomes the inseparable companion of a Texas farm boy in the 1860s until their bitter separation. This book also was made into a classic children's movie.

Island of the Blue Dolphins, by Scott O'Dell. An Indian girl spends eighteen years alone on an island off the coast of California. This story is about Karana, who learns about nature and herself as she struggles to survive. She both tames wild animals to combat her loneliness and battles animals for her life.

ZAP! A Brief History of Television, by Marian Calabro. *ZAP!* explores every aspect of the powerful medium called television. This book takes the reader through the invention of TV and into the twenty-first century. *ZAP!* also takes a look into what television is like in countries around the world.

8

Teamwork Learning

A new kind of learning is taking place in classrooms across the country. It's not so new, really. It is actually the kind of learning that was commonplace in the one-room schoolhouses where many of our great-grandparents learned reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic. In the old one-room schoolhouse, students who had already learned a certain skill or mastered a concept helped others to learn it also. There, everyone was a teacher and everyone was a student because they all learned from one another. Families who learn and work together have always been like that.

Today's educators are using this old and proven learning model in modern classrooms. Because these teachers recognize the value of team learning, they are organizing students to share their knowledge and skills with one another.

Here are some examples of activities going on in cooperative learning situations:

- In a first-grade classroom, two children sit in a corner on large pillows and hold between them a book which has both pictures and words. Each child has a pencil in his hand, and as they look through the book together, each of them stops now and then to circle a word he has recognized.

  They talk about the pictures and about what they think is happening in the story. As they help one another figure out what is written in the book, they look at the words they have circled. When they cannot understand a sentence because they don't recognize enough of the words in it, they ask another child for help.

These boys are not afraid to say to a classmate or a teacher, "What does this mean?" because they are used to asking for help from others. They have been trained to see learning as a teamwork activity.

- In a fifth-grade classroom it is math period, and the teacher presents a lesson on decimals. After the lesson is finished, students work in small groups doing decimal problems. They help each other put what the teacher has told them into practice. Because the students work in teams, each member shares his or her understanding of decimal problems with other members who are having trouble getting a grip on the idea. They study worksheets and work problems together. Helping each other seems quite natural to these fifth graders.

  Even though they study together, students take their test on decimals individually. The teacher rewards their cooperative effort. She gives special recognition certificates to the team whose members show the largest total improvement over their previous test scores.

- A classroom of sixth graders has been reading different books that deal with the common theme of survival in the wild. After each of the students has finished her novel, they all meet in small groups to write stories which explore the same theme of human beings trying to survive in the wilderness.

  Each child plays a different role as they decide about the setting, characters, and main challenge or predicament which will face the characters in their story. After they have talked these problems out, they spend several days composing their story; then they read it to the rest of the class.

These sixth graders have not only learned something valuable about how literature is created, they have also learned important lessons about how to work with and get along with others.

All of these students are learning cooperatively. They cooperate in order to learn, and in doing so they share their knowledge and understanding. Learning in a team helps these students accomplish a common and clearly defined goal, and it helps them learn how to help one another. Your family can also act as a learning team in which individual members help each other learn and grow and accomplish important goals.

Children Learn Better in Teams

Studies indicate that there is less rivalry and more friendliness in classrooms (and families) in which people learn cooperatively. Cooperative learning also seems to encourage students who are overly aggressive or especially shy to integrate themselves into the group more easily than they do in a more competitive situation. Teamwork learning helps children realize that they need to listen to one another, and that they need to work through difficulties and misunderstandings if they are going to accomplish their goals.

Studies prove that children who help one another learn

- have higher motivation
- show academic improvement
- experience increased self-esteem
- develop a more positive view of the intentions of others
- more easily accept that others may be different
- feel less dependent on their teacher or parent
- achieve higher test scores

Cooperative learning seems especially valuable in activities that pose problems which need to be solved. It promotes critical thinking because learners must work together to define a common goal and then devise strategies for reaching that goal. In my family, when a third grader got the assignment of figuring out what early explorers in the Canadian Yukon could find to eat, we all got involved. An older brother said he would search the encyclopedia. Mother called Uncle Bob who worked on an oil pipeline up there. The third grader called the librarian for answers. Together, we solved the problem and in the process we taught each other a lot more than the answer to this single question.

Help Your Children Claim Ownership of What They Know

Have you ever had the experience of helping your child with her science project and then discovering that it has suddenly become your science project? The example of the family solving the Yukon question shows you ways of having several participants without taking the project out of the hands of the true owner.

Learning is an active process. Research indicates that children more easily learn and most effectively remember knowledge which they have in some way dramatized or performed. Acting out, talking, singing, or writing about new knowledge is a way for children to claim ownership of new ideas and incorporate them into their own understanding of the world in which we live. The give and take involved in teamwork learning promotes this kind of ownership.

What Is the Parent's Role in Teamwork Learning?

In most classroom situations, the members of a learning team are of more or less equal status in knowledge and experience so that they can trade off roles as tutor and student, leader and follower. But in the case of parents or teachers involved in cooperative learning with children, the roles are more clearly defined.

When one member of a team has greater knowledge than the others, that member can lead the initial conver-

sation in such a way that he helps the other members to think and talk until they arrive at their own conclusions. In this way, adults enable children to come up with procedures, knowledge, or skills that will be useful in other situations beyond the immediate one. If I give my daughter the answer to a long division problem she is struggling with, I have helped her through her immediate difficulty but I have not helped her learn how to think about long division problems.

The major goal of the teacher or parent in collaborative talk is to direct the conversation so that members of a learning team are able to make connections which lead them to conclusions of their own making. In this way, children become progressively more capable of taking responsibility for their own learning.

How can parents be most effective in leading children to their own conclusions? Try following these simple guidelines:

- Take the child's attempt to solve the problem on his own seriously. Give him credit for putting forth his best effort. Say to him: "You are right in asking for information. Keep asking and searching until you have what you need to decide on your answer."

- Listen carefully as your child tells you what she understands about the problem or the project. Ask her to explain or provide examples for certain points which you find a little hazy. Ask lots of "why" and "how" questions. By explaining things to you, she may understand what she still needs to investigate.

- Make sure you have clearly understood your child's explanation of his goals by rephrasing what he has said to you. Using his own account as a starting point, repeat, extend, or develop what he has said. Encourage your

child to push his own ideas further if necessary. You can do this just by echoing his own statements. Say something like "So I hear you are going to do thus and such . . .," then pause to give your child time to further explain or clarify his plan if he needs to do so.

- "Lead from behind" by offering only enough feedback to help your child figure out the problem for herself. Your role is to be an "active" listener who repeats and reviews and occasionally gives advice. To "lead from behind" you must be careful not to take over the project. Respect and support your child's efforts to work through her own problems.

Remember the old saying, "Give a person a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a person to fish and feed him for a lifetime?" When it comes to our role in cooperative learning, we contribute most by helping our children realize that they can solve many school problems with just a little guidance and help from Mom and Dad. Teamwork learning means that everyone has a chance to do his or her own part.

Activities for Fun and Learning

Try a few of the following activities with your children to help them learn together.

Who's Next?

Practice your cooperative learning and thinking skills by making up and telling stories together. On an evening when the whole family is having dinner together, take some time after the meal to do this fun activity.

One person begins by imagining and then describing the setting of a story you will all tell as a group. This first person talks about where and when the story takes place. The next person describes the characters in the story and gives them names. Then the rest of the people at the table take turns telling the story. Each of you makes up two or three sentences which tell what happened to these people in this place. Go around the table and give everyone a turn to contribute until someone decides how to end the story. You might even want to ask one member of the family to write the story down as it is told (or you could record the story more easily by just turning on a tape recorder).

If you do this on a regular basis, the written down or recorded stories will make a wonderful addition to your family memory scrapbook or photo album. Wouldn't it be fun to be able to share these memories with your children when they are grown up, or to pass these stories on to your grandchildren?

Journal Jotting

Help your child learn that writing is a meaningful activity that he can use as a tool for personal expression. Begin a dialogue journal that you and your child can both contribute to on a daily basis.

Reading Co-op

Reading aloud can be a cooperative learning activity when you and your child discuss what is happening in the story, or when you let your child read to you. As you read a story to your child, pause now and then and ask him to interpret part of it. Ask him why he thinks a character does what she does. Ask your child to interpret or draw conclusions about the story as you read it, and then ask him to summarize it after you have finished reading. Share your ideas and learn about the story together. You may be surprised by your child's interpretation of what happens in the story. You might also ask your child to read the story to you so that you can be the one to answer questions and offer opinions.

Your Turn

Write a story with your child. Here is how: each of you writes a sentence, or part of a sentence, of the story. You might begin by writing, "Once upon a time there was . . . "

For example:

Once upon a time there was a beautiful . . .

. . . unicorn named Rebecca, and she was so beautiful that her horn and her heels were golden.

She lived in an enchanted woods, where . . .

. . . all the unicorns play. But she was sad because she had no wings to fly with.

And so many of the other unicorns teased her . . .

. . . But all of the other unicorns were not as beautiful as her, and so she decided to make a pair of wings.

Every day for many moons Rebecca gathered golden pieces of straw . . .

. . . to make wings with. But the other unicorns did not think she could do it, so they laughed at her.

She did not give up, though; she kept working, and one night when the moon was full she . . .
. . . realized she had grown beautiful wings, so she did not need the straw.

Rebecca said, "What shall I do with all of this straw?"
And suddenly from the grove of tulip trees she saw a . . .
. . . fairy who said to her. Let me take the straw, please, and I will weave it into a golden castle for you to live in because . . .
. . . you worked so hard to make wings and never gave up.

Besides, I love you, and I want you to live happily forever. . .
. . . And the other unicorns didn't tease Rebecca ever again, and they wished they were as beautiful and they had a castle, too.

THE END

Books for Parents

Learningames for Threes and Fours: A Guide to Adult / Child Play, by Joseph Sparling and Isabelle Lewis. Presents a hundred games and play ideas that coincide with child-development patterns. Supports learning through play with emphasis on self-image, independence, reasoning, creativity, sharing, coordination, and language.

Time Out Together: A Month-by-Month Guide to Activities to Enjoy with Your Children, by Jan Brennan. Presents pastimes and activities for parents to share with their children. Most can be done at home using everyday materials.

How to Help Your Child with Homework, by Marguerite C. Radencich and Jeanne Shay Schumm (Free Spirit Publishing). Offers charts, resources, games, and study tools to help parents assist their children with homework. Topics include reading, spelling, writing, math, science, social studies, reports, and tests.

Helping Your Child Achieve in School, by Dr. Barbara Johnson. Deals with motivation, reading, testing, and beginning school. Also covers parents and teachers as partners, gifted children, and computers.

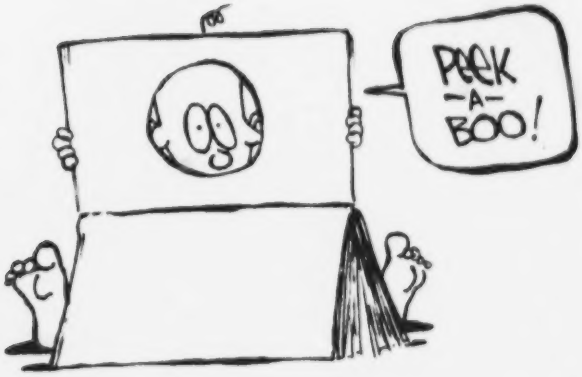
Books for Parents and Children to Share Together

Ages 4–6

Across the Stream, by Mirra Ginsburg (Mulberry Books). A mother duck and her three baby ducklings work together to rescue a hen and her three chicks from a fox. Each duck carries a chicken on its back and swims across the stream to safety. Includes colorful illustrations and large, bold print.

Frederick, by Leo Lionni. Frederick helps his family of field mice see that creatures need more than just shelter and food supplies to survive. Frederick contributes to the group's survival by using his imagination to create poetry and stories that sustain them during the long winter.

Hocus Pocus: A Pop-up Book, by Julie Lacome (Tambourine Books). As a parent reads the text that asks a question about what the rabbit magician is doing, a child will be able to answer the question by manipulating the flaps, tabs, and wheels. This enables both to contribute to the "reading" of the book. Touches on colors, counting, and other basic concepts.



Guess What? (a Peek-A-Boo book), by Taro Gomi (Chronicle Books). Parents and children can take turns or try to figure out together answers to clues that appear through the die-cut holes on each page. This book is small and the sturdy cardboard pages are easy to turn.

Guess Who? (a Peek-A-Boo book), by Taro Gomi (Chronicle Books). As in *Guess What?* die-cut holes appear on each page, but in this book, the holes are the eyes of various familiar creatures. Pictures, clues, and words help children identify each of these creatures.

Guess What? by Mordicai Gerstein and Susan Yard Harris (Crown Publishers). Parents and children together can determine what might be in each surprise package the young girl in this book receives. Eleven fold-out flaps help to illustrate the numbers one through ten.

Ages 6–8

Who Is the Boss? by Josse Goffin (Clarion Books). Two passengers argue over who is in charge and who is better, until their ship crashes and sinks. This short

story with simple text demonstrates the importance of teamwork in reaching a goal.

While You Are Asleep, by Gwynne L. Isaacs (Walker and Company). Presents different night jobs some people hold, and indirectly shows the importance of their jobs to the community. Descriptions include the positions of bus driver, police officer, phone operator, nurse, and doctor.

Oh, What a Mess, by Hans Wilhelm (Crown Publishers). Franklin the pig shares some ideas with his family that help them clean up their house and themselves. In the process, Franklin becomes a talented artist, and his family learns how to remain neat and clean.

Underwear! by Mary Elise Monsell. Zachary Zebra, Orfo Orangutan, and Igor Egret like silly underwear. Together they teach Bismark Buffalo how to laugh and have fun. Bismark not only learns how to enjoy life, but also how to be a cheerful friend to others.

Moose on the Loose, by Carol Partridge Ochs (Carolrhoda Books). A moose has escaped from the Zown Town Zoo, and a chartreuse caboose is missing from the railroad. An unlikely group join forces to form a search party. They have a great time in their search for both adventurers.

New Kid on Spurwink Ave., by Michael Crowley (Little, Brown). The kids in Leonard's new neighborhood think he is boring and doesn't know how to play. When Leonard teaches them other ways to play, they learn a few things about having fun, and finally they accept him into their "gang."

Ages 8–10

Shadowgraphs Anyone Can Make, by Phila H. Webb and Jane Corby (Running Press). Each page shows how to develop a shadow character using the hands. Short rhymes accompany each black and white illus-

tration. Children can work with each other or with their parents to make the characters.

Bee Bopp, by Stephen Cosgrove. When Bee Bopp moves to Buggville and begins Buttonwood school, she gets in trouble the first day and is suspended. Lord and Lady Bugg become her private tutors and help her see that a bugg doesn't have to be rude and loud to get attention from others.

The Rag Coat, by Lauren Mills (Little, Brown). Minna does not have a winter coat, so the Quilting Mothers work together to make a rag coat for her out of their quilting scraps. When the children at school hurt Minna by making fun of her coat, she tells them stories about the origins of the different scraps. They share memories with each other and learn what it means to be a real friend.

The Long Red Scarf, by Nette Hilton (Carolrhoda Books). Pop wants a scarf to keep him warm when he goes fishing, but he can't find anyone to make him one. Cousin Izzy and his friend Jake teach him how to knit so he can make a scarf for himself.

The Berenstain Bears and the Missing Honey, by Jan and Stan Berenstain. Papa Bear's blackberry honey is gone and Papa Bear, Sister Bear, Brother Bear, Cousin Fred, and Snuff the sniffer hound form a detective squad to find out what happened to it. Together they search for clues and eventually solve the mystery of the missing honey.

Charlotte's Web, by E. B. White. The Zuckermans plan to kill Wilbur the pig and turn him into bacon and ham. Charlotte leads a group effort to save him, and Wilbur assists her family in return. This is a touching story and works well as a "read aloud".

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Books for Families

The Curious Learner: Help Your Child Develop Academic and Creative Skills
by Marjorie R. Simic, Melinda McClain, and Michael Shermis

Shows parents how to develop children's natural curiosity about math, science, and history, plus ways to spark their interest in poetry, music, art, and writing.
BB-100-1013, $9.95

The Confident Learner: Help Your Child Succeed In School
by Marjorie R. Simic, Melinda McClain, and Michael Shermis

With this book, parents help their children develop strong motivation, self-discipline, good health and fitness, and the ability to deal with stress—all of which affect success in school. Includes ways to develop a good relationship with your child's teacher and school.
BB-100-1023, $9.95

Help Your Child Read and Succeed: A Parent's Guide
by Carl B. Smith

This book offers guidance for parents of beginning and intermediate readers. Lots of activities help with comprehension, study skills, phonics, vocabulary, and book selection.
BB-100-1019, $12.95

Family Book Sharing Groups: Start One In Your Neighborhood!
by Marjorie R. Simic and Eleanor C. Macfarlane

A step-by-step guide to conducting a book sharing group in your school, community, or place of worship. Includes detailed agendas for six meetings.
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by Carl B. Smith with Susan Moke and Marjorie R. Simic

This inspiring book shows parents how to make book sharing and open communication a reality with their children.
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by Carl B. Smith

A handy source of answers, explanations, and practice for young learners and their parents.
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